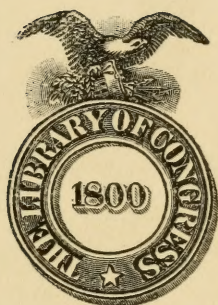


# HAPPY HOLLOW FARM



WILLIAM R. LIGHTON





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**HAPPY HOLLOW FARM**

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**WILLIAM R. LIGHTON**









LIFE TOOK ON NEW SAVORS



# *Happy Hollow Farm*

By

*William R. Lighton*

*Author of "Letters of an Old Farmer to His Son"*

*Illustrated*



*New York  
George H. Doran Company*

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**HAPPY HOLLOW FARM**



# HAPPY HOLLOW FARM

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## I

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SUPPOSE you had wanted some big thing with all your heart for all your life; and suppose you knew that your wife had always wanted just the same thing in just the same way. Suppose that in the fullness of time, when you were in the very prime of your years, with the joy of life at its strongest, this fond dream should become reality; and suppose that after half a dozen years of actual experience you should find the reality better beyond compare than the dream ever dared be. Suppose all this, and how do you suppose you'd feel?

Well, that's the story of Happy Hollow Farm.

Maybe I'd better say right at the beginning, and have it over with, that ours is different from the general run of back-to-the-land



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stories. There was no harsh or bitter fact in our lives that drove us to farming as a last hope. I hadn't lost my job in town. I wasn't facing a nervous breakdown after long years of faithful service of an inhuman employer. We hadn't been worn to desperation trying to make both ends meet. Nothing like that. The plain, unromantic facts were that no man could have desired a kinder, better tempered, more considerate boss than I had. I was my own boss. For a long time I'd been making a pretty fair-to-middling living for my family, writing stuff for the magazines. Income was growing better and better as the years passed. We were getting our full share of the enjoyment of books and music and the rest of life's refinements. We were seeing something of the world between whiles; we were making friends worth having; we were steadily widening our circle and getting good out of every minute of it. Besides, we were getting ahead a little. As for the health part of it, there wasn't a doctor of our acquaintance whom I couldn't have worn to a wilted wreck in a day's cross-country hike or a long pull at the oars.

I'm telling you this so frankly, not by way of bragging, but just to let you know that it

wasn't a sense of failure or weakness or impending evil that set our minds toward our farm. We were faring uncommonly well. If we fussed a little now and then, wishing for something we hadn't, the fussing wasn't serious. The long and short of it is that if carking care had sought a roost on our roof in those days she'd have been driven to startled flight by the sounds of jocund well-being that overflowed the place.

Yet with so much happiness we hadn't reached the supreme content, the sense of crowning completeness. It's not easy to make that feeling plain. To be happily satisfied with life's richness, and yet to be possessed by great desire—there's something of the idea. We had our vision, Laura and I, and it was always with us.

The vision was not of great possessions, nor of great fame and high place, nor of any other of the fair, false lures to disappointment. It was a vision of Home. So that you may understand the rest of what I'm to write, I must try to make you see that vision as we saw it.

Laura and I were married in 1890. From the first our ideals of home hadn't a hair's breadth of difference. You might say that our

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idea took form before we were born; for each of us came of a long line of home-makers. It was in our blood. We might differ about other things, but never about that. For both of us home was life's one great essential. It wasn't merely a pretty sentiment; it was a ruling passion.

We were agreed in this, too: We would never compromise our vision; we would never let life offer us something "just as good" and accept it as the real thing. We should know a counterfeit when we saw it. We might have to accept postponement and maybe ultimate defeat; but we'd go down with our colors nailed to the masthead. Talk about fixed ideas! We certainly had one of 'em.

Before ever we set pencil to paper with the first scrawled sketch, we had the picture in our minds. Wide spaces—that was the essence of it. It wouldn't answer at all that we should have just any sort of roof over our heads and then let the spirit of contentment do the rest. It wouldn't do at all that we should just "take a house," live in it till we were tired, and then swap it for another, on the chance of by and by finding something that would suit us well enough. We didn't



have to do any blind groping toward our reality. We knew from the very beginning what it must be.

A beautiful setting, somewhere, with hills and woods and clear water and far vistas—that's what we must find. We had never seen that spot; but we had faith. It must exist. There our house would stand, nestled safe in the heart of soft delights.

And such a house! For eighteen years it grew in our minds, taking form slowly, slowly. A wide-spreading roof of beautiful lines; and beneath the roof wide, generous spaces. There must be nothing cramped. Our idea expressed itself in spaciousness, not in luxury. We must have lots of room. The living center of the whole thing would be a great, massive fireplace of stone, wide, deep-throated, fit to hold a roaring winter fire of huge logs of oak and hickory. Do you remember that Christmas scene in *Pickwick Papers*, with the jovial old *Wardle* and his friends gathered about the blaze? In our first years together Laura and I read that story. After that, do you fancy you could have induced us to plan for steam radiators or a furnace in the basement? Right from that minute that fireplace was ours.

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Around this our thoughts grouped themselves, opening out, broadening, room by room, space upon space, with nothing grudged and no mean subterfuges. We were to build, not for ourselves alone, but for generations. We dreamed of a home that, not in our lifetime alone, but through the generations to come after us, would slowly, slowly grow richer and richer in all life's sweetnesses and gentle memories. We would build an abiding place for the spirit that endures.

Most likely you can understand, without more telling, what we were driving at. Most of us, at one time or another, have nursed that fond notion. Laura and I clung to it as the first-born inspiration of our life together. Bit by bit we watched it grow. For years upon years we kept a portfolio of pictures and sketches and scraps; and now and then, when our life seemed to be halting a little, as if to catch its breath, we'd get these out and look them through and talk them over. That helped, no end.

There was one thing we always carefully avoided in our talks—the perfectly plain impossibility of actually doing this thing we were dreaming about, as matters stood with us. We

lived at Omaha in those days. To make the barest beginning on that home of ours up there would have taken a small fortune. We had no fortune, and there was no chance of our ever getting one. Laura knew that as well as I did. I don't know why that didn't make us disgruntled or melancholy; but it didn't. Eighteen years is a long time to wait for the thing you want, as we wanted that home.

It was worth waiting for. Fulfillment of great desire is always worth waiting for. We have found fulfillment of our desire.

As I'm putting these words on paper, it's midnight. Excepting the lamp on my desk, lights are out in the house. Laura and the children went to bed an hour ago. It's early May, but the nights are still cool here. I built up a fire at sunset; a fire of oak and hickory logs banked against a big blackjack backlog. After supper we sat around the hearth, and I held little Peggy on my lap and read to her out of the *Jungle Books* until she grew drowsy. After that, Laura and I sat together for an hour or so, not talking much, but looking into the red flare and flicker of the flames, thinking. By and by she told me



good-night, and I came over to my own room to write for a little while.

The fire still burns, softly. From where I sit I can see it glowing in the deep stone fireplace down the length of the big living room, and watch the ruddy, warm shadows on the walls and the high arched ceiling. It's very beautiful. There's a brilliant full moon in mid-heaven. The living-room floor is checkered with golden light falling through the small square panes of the long doors and windows. Looking out, I can see the long, soft, moonlit slope of the land toward the river, a half mile away; and beyond, the full rise of the spring-clothed, mist-crowned Ozark hills. It's very beautiful. One of my windows stands open, and on the slow air the odor of sweetbrier comes in. There's the smell of moist earth, too, and now and then a whiff of the pungent tang of wood smoke from some big brush fires that were set this afternoon. If I listen, I can hear the low chuckle of a brook a little way from the house.

This is fulfillment. This is the home of our dreams come true, just as we saw it through those eighteen years of waiting.

How did it come about? Well, that's the story, of course.

Maybe there's no better way to put it than just to say that our idea wouldn't wait any longer to be born. Ideas are a good bit like other living things; when the birthtime comes, you can't put it off just because you think you're not ready. That's the way it seemed to work with us.

It was in the early spring of 1908. Laura was away from home on a visit. While she was gone, one night I got out paper and pencil and set to work. Until that time we hadn't even tried to make a finished plan; we had only sketches and scraps, here a little and there a little, on vagrant sheets. I began putting them together. Before I went to sleep that night I had sent to Laura my completed drafts.

They came back to me with only two words of comment: "Simply perfect!" That gave me plenty to think about until Laura got home.

"Well," I said then, "if that house is all right, let's go find a place to put it, so we can be getting started on it."

Laura laughed. I'd known that she would. She had always said that she was the "practi-

cal" one. She isn't a bit more practical than I am, if you get right down to it; but never mind that now. The point is that she laughed. No doubt it did sound funny.

"All right!" I said. "But we're going to build that house, just the way it lies there, before the end of this year. We're going to spend next Christmas in that very identical house."

"Why, old man!" Laura chided. She thought I was fooling. We had never got into the way of joking about that home of ours; we'd as soon have jested about an ailing child. By and by, when I kept on nagging, she knew she'd have to deal with me.

"Why, how are we possibly going to do it?" she asked. That's the sort of question that some people call "practical."

"I don't know," I said; "but we're going to start right off now and find out. We can't do it here; that's true enough. It isn't a town-lot proposition. A suburban acre or two won't do. We must have lots of land. That home is going to need a big farm to go with it. It's going to be an old-fashioned homestead sort of thing. I guess we're agreed on that. Well,



then, the thing to do is to go and hunt up our farm."

That brought on more conversation. Laura didn't want to hurt; but she had to say it sooner or later. "Have you forgotten that it takes money to buy a farm?" she asked. "You know how much money we have."

I knew, well enough. By shaking out and cashing in all our resources we could have in hand in real money something less than four thousand dollars. I'll admit that that made me feel a bit uneasy. If it had been forty thousand I'd have felt better. Even forty thousand in Omaha wouldn't have let us "get by" with what we meant to do.

"No matter," I said. "Just listen to this, now: We want that place, wherever it is. It's ridiculous to suppose that it doesn't exist somewhere, when we've wanted it so long and so faithfully. We've never really tried to find it. That's what we're going to do now."

"But if we had a big farm, what should we do with it?" Laura persisted. "We're not farmers." It beats all how very practical a practical person can be if she puts her mind to it.

I'm bound to own that Laura was right, on

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the face of things. Neither of us was even distantly related to a farmer, except by marriage. That part of it didn't strike me as hopeless, though. We were used to keeping a cow and a few hens; our town-lot garden had always been the envy of the neighbors; for the last five years I'd been tending an acre of small fruits with uncommon success. We had the knack of making things grow and thrive. As the Frenchman says, we had "the smell for the soil." Besides, for years upon years we had been tireless readers of the literature of modern farming; we knew a lot of the theory of it. No, that part didn't appear hopeless, not by a long shot.

"Anyway," I said, "we can learn. That's not worrying me now. The point is to find the farm. We'll start so soon as you want to pack your suitcase."

Do you believe that the great gods ever give us mortals a "hunch"? Maybe we might as well believe it. If we don't, then we have to believe in luck, which isn't a speck more scientific.

Something or other, by whatever name you call it, led us straight to our dream-farm. I bought railway tickets to Fayetteville, Arkan-

sas. There wasn't any reason in it; ordinary human intelligence had nothing whatever to do with it. We didn't know a blessed thing about Arkansas; indeed, we shared a very common prejudice against her. You know how folks have always felt about Arkansas—that she's nothing but a dead spot on a live map. If we had tried to reason it out, we shouldn't have come to Fayetteville. But we didn't reason. A few days before I'd happened to get hold of a "farms-for-sale" list sent out by a Fayetteville real estate man. We'd read thousands of such circulars. There was nothing seductive about this one; it was indifferently written and badly printed, as if with an eye single to cheapness. I'll never tell you why; but on that list I'd checked a farm. There was nothing alluring in the description: "120 acres 2½ mi. from town, part cleared, no improvements, \$2400. Part Cash." The rest of the circular let us know that Fayetteville was in the heart of the Ozark mountain country, and that here was the seat of the state university. That's all we had to go by.

It was the middle of a March night when we got to Fayetteville and went to bed. We waked in the morning in a blaze of crystal and

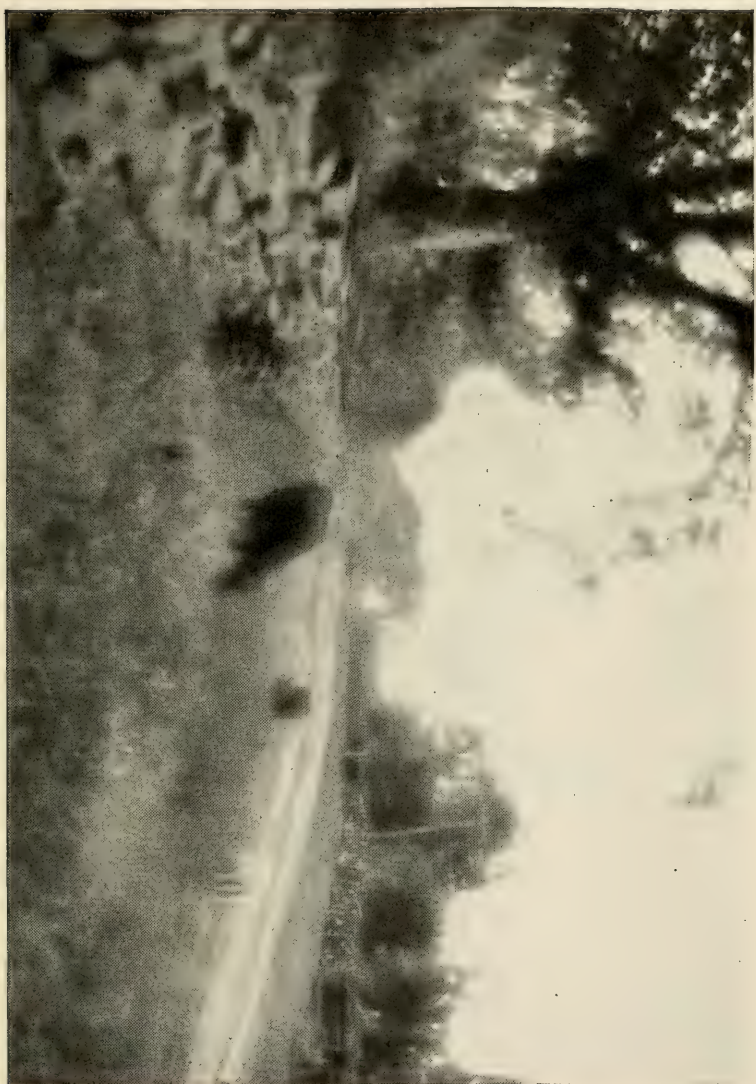


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golden glory. I didn't know quite what to make of it. Did you ever have your senses literally stunned by a flood of delights? It needed a little time to understand that this was the sunrise breaking in upon us. We stood together by the window, looking out. Before us lay a picture that just stubbornly won't be put into words. There were tree-arched roads and the white houses of the town. Beyond we could see the somber-toned buildings of the university. Below us, through a winding hollow, ran a shining river; and then again beyond, rolling miles on miles into the mist-softened distance, spread the billowy hills of the Boston Range, flushed with spring. Over all, mellowing it, suffusing it, melting it into liquid beauty, was that wonderful flooding light. "The light that never was on sea or land"—do you remember that? That's what it made me think of.

We walked the streets for an hour after breakfast, not saying much, but looking, looking. Wherever we looked, through every open space, there lay our hills, misty blue and misty green and misty gold—wonderful, wonderful! We loved them. I think we both felt, right





THE OLD HUNTSVILLE ROAD



from that first hour, that we had come to the end of our rainbow.

"Well," I said, after a while, "we might as well go and have a look at the farm." There was only one farm in our minds. Think what you will, say what you like about it, the thing was already settled. We hunted up our real estate man, told him what we wanted, and showed him our checked copy of his list. "We want a place quite in the rough," I explained; "one that we may improve for ourselves. You understand."

He took a good look at us, to make sure that he understood. No doubt he had us sized up about right, as a couple of crazy enthusiasts. He didn't try to argue us out of our notion. "Yes," he said, "I guess maybe that place might suit you, if you really want one in the rough." Without more talk we drove out of town.

It was an old, old road we traveled; the Huntsville Road, it's called. Settlement of this Ozark country began a full century ago, in a day when rude trails were the only traveled ways. The Huntsville Road survived from the old times. It showed its age. Gray, tottering stone walls and gray, rotting rail



fences meandered on either side, grown over with wild blackberries and thorny smilax and sassafras bushes. Here and there a huge elm bent over, its buds just breaking into frothy green. The rare farms along the road wore a shaggy, unkempt look. The road itself was rough—oh, yes, quite rough! Up hill and down it wandered, rain-rutted, twisting back and forth in quest of a smooth place it seemed never to find. We bumped quite a lot as we rode; if the driver tried to dodge a stone in the wheel-tracks, he was sure to drop into a “chug-hole.”

“They’ll be working these roads when spring opens up a little more,” our real estate man said. He needn’t have bothered to say anything about it. We weren’t really minding the bumps; for ahead of us, with a fresh revelation at each new turn of the way, opened the White River Valley, rimmed with the hills. We gazed and gazed, and couldn’t get enough of gazing.

By and by, turning off through a narrow, stony lane, we came to a rude wire gate in a crumbling rail fence. Just inside the gate the carriage halted.

“This is the place,” our real estater said; and

then, like a wise man, he sat waiting. I think he had his doubts. We found out afterward that this farm of ours had been for years a standing joke to the real estate folk of Fayetteville. Nobody wanted it—its owner least of all. That's how it happened to be waiting for us. We had no doubts. That farm was ours!

What we saw was a rough, untidy expanse, a half mile across, stretching from point to point of a deep crescent of low wooded hills that opened toward the south. Here and there, at broken intervals, lay a tiny irregular patch of ground under plow; and in between these were deep, tangled thickets of wild growths, dense as a jungle. In the depths of this wilderness, somewhere near us, we could hear a brook making sport in a stony bed. Along the banks towered giant sycamores and feathery-limbed elms and stately walnuts. Countless plumed heads of dogwood bloom were thrust out of the greenery, and we caught the odor of hawthorn and honey locust.

"Come!" Laura said; and we got out of the carriage and walked down into the heart of the wild hollow, pushing the tangle aside that we might get close to the water's edge. The

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brook ran clear and free and cold. A little way up the bank we found a deep flowing spring, walled in in some old day, and brimming full. The ground was smothered in a very riot of spring bloom. Away up in the very tip-top of a sycamore, straight over our heads, a mocking-bird began singing, fit to split his little throat. I looked at Laura, and Laura looked at me; a smile passed between us—and it was all over!

Oh, I know what you're thinking: "That's no way to buy a farm." Well, don't I know it? But this wasn't a farm. It had been a farm once, long ago, and it would be a farm again by and by; but just then it was simply acres and acres of raw, untamed beauty, inviting us.

We walked around a little. The place lay in the form of an L—eighty acres across the south front, with forty acres of woodland on a hill at the back. There were three brooks wandering through the land. We stood at the edge of the woods and let our eyes follow their courses. Wherever we looked, Possibility was written large.

"There's wood enough right here," I said, "to run our big fireplace for a thousand years!"

The agent's circular had spoken solemn truth



in saying that the place had no improvements. Nobody would have thought of giving that name to the weather-beaten old log house standing on the hill-slope, sheltering the tenant farmer and his family. The walls were mud-chinked, the doors hung awry, the broken windows were patched with paper and stuffed with faded rags. The house-yard was an ugly litter of refuse of unnumbered years of shiftless living. Near by was a tumble-down stable of thatched poles. Down below, by the big spring, stood a log-walled granary—without any grain in it. No, there weren't any improvements.

The tenant, a lean, listless man of the hills, came up and joined us presently.

"You-uns thinkin' of buyin' thish-yere farm?" he wanted to know. "It ain't worth nothin'. It's a turrible sorry farm. You-all could starve plumb to death on thish-yere farm."

Even the real-estater showed signs of emotion when we told him we were ready to talk turkey. The price was twenty dollars an acre; we might pay one-fourth down and have any time we liked for paying the rest. We didn't try to dicker. If we had but known it we

might have shaved several hundred dollars from that price by holding out and whip-sawing a while. We found that out afterward. If the agent had but known it, he might have doubled the price on us and we shouldn't have turned a hair. So maybe we're even. We certainly wanted that place—and we certainly got it. The trade was closed that afternoon.

"Well, we've bought something," I said to Laura when we were back at the hotel, slicking up a little for supper. To tell the truth, I was just the least trifle dismayed, now that it was all over and the tension relaxed and I could think deliberately of what we had done. I think Laura had something of that feeling, too.

"Yes, old man," she said. It seemed to me that her tone lacked gayety; but maybe I was wrong about that.

"Isn't it beautiful?" I went on.

"Perfectly beautiful!" she said. There was the ring of enthusiasm this time. "But did you hear what that tenant said? He said we could starve to death on that farm."

"Oh, well!" I joked. "We could starve to death anywhere, if we wanted to."

There was a silence. The silence drew out

and out. When I stole a glance at her she was standing at the window, looking away across the hills, touching her lips with a finger-tip—a little trick she has when she's thoughtful. She has never told me what she was thinking about, all to herself, in that minute. I've wondered. When she turned from the window presently she was quite herself, smiling, game for anything.

"Could you see where the house is to stand?" I asked.

"Yes!" she flashed. "On that little knoll at the edge of the oats field, by that big wild cherry tree."

"That's the place!" I said. We stood together then and watched the sunset color fading; watched till there was nothing to see but the dull flush of the afterglow. "Come!" I said then. "We must get supper and be ready for the train home."

"Home!" Laura said. "Why, this is Home!"

I've told you some rather intimate things; for I've wanted you to know the state of mind we were in when we began our life of farming. We weren't driven to it, you see; we didn't go



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at it in fear and trembling, as a last hard resort. We went at it with fine, strong zest, as to our life's crowning adventure. I think that promised pretty well for happiness.

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## II

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OUR farm was bought in March of 1908. Six weeks later, in early May, we had cut loose from our old life and had come to Arkansas to begin the new.

Nothing would satisfy us but to go at once to the farm. Thinking back, I have to laugh at our impetuous temper. There wasn't a building on the place fit to live in; besides, the tenant's lease covered that year, to the end of the cropping season. We had no rights at all upon the land, save by sufferance, until the new year's crop would be gathered. There was some satisfaction, though, in thinking that this tenant was our tenant now. We had acquired him with the farm. He was farming "on shares," and was to give one half of whatever he harvested, by way of rental. We discovered after a time that this share of the crop had almost enabled the former owner to keep the taxes paid.

No matter about that. We had a tenant;

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and he would be in possession of the farm, under a perfectly good contract, for the next seven or eight months. We had to negotiate with him for the privilege of coming upon the land to live in the meantime.

We discovered at once that we weren't going to be riotously fond of this tenant. He was very fussy, very jealous of those rights of his. He grudged the permission he gave us to pitch camp in the thicket down between the empty granary and the big spring. That was the only available spot, and we took it. It really suited us first-rate.

We got into town in the early morning of that May day. By noon we had secured a big tent and had bought camp tools and supplies—laundry soap, and rope, and salt, and matches, and an ax, and some canned tomatoes, and a bottle of witch-hazel, and coffee, and oilcloth, and flour, and a couple of water buckets, and baking powder—a wagon-load of truck. Right after dinner we went out with this stuff. By the middle of the afternoon we had the tent set up and our beds laid out for night. I brought wood and water then, and at sunset we had our supper, holding our plates



in our laps, sitting on the ground around an open campfire.

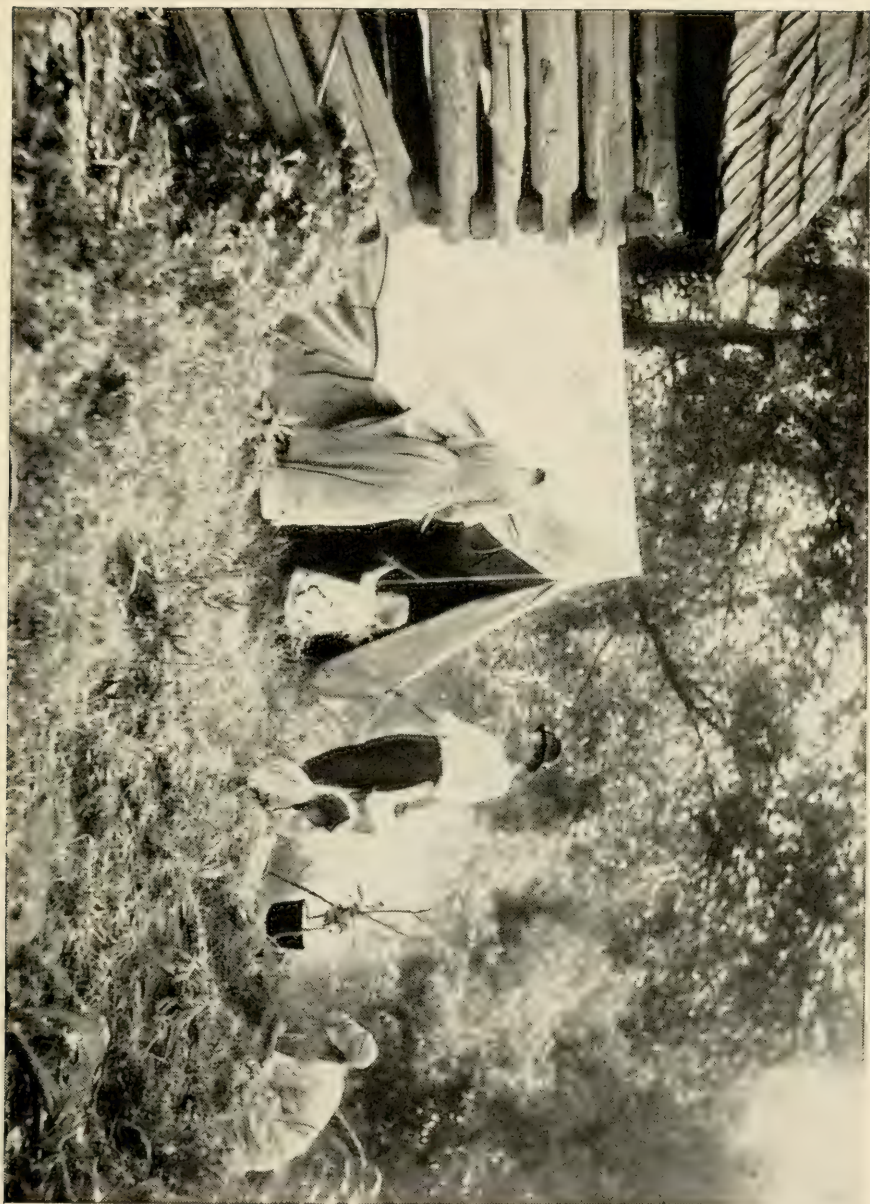
There were six of us: Laura, and my mother, and Dorothy, our daughter of fifteen, and Louis, who was twelve, and little Peggy, not yet three, and I, coming forty-two in the summer. Oh, yes, and there was Lee. I wish you might have known Lee. I don't know how old he was; but he was a pronounced brunette with a trick of showing the whites of his eyes and his shining white teeth when anything tickled him. Something was always tickling him. We'd found him in Kansas and had brought him with us to Arkansas. Truly, he was a jolly soul. He's doing a life sentence in the Kansas penitentiary now, poor chap. I'll tell you more about Lee as we go along. It turned out that he was just no good at all for work; but while he lasted he was the Br'er Bones of our enterprise.

While I live I shan't forget that first night at Happy Hollow. We dawdled over supper, talking and laughing, making happy jests at our own madness. Then the dusk came on, and slowly the darkness settled about us and shut us in. Somehow that darkness subdued our merriment, quieted us, set us to listening.

Queer, eerie sounds were pulsing through the thickets. There was an intermittent flicker of fireflies, back and forth. Whippoorwills were calling in the gloom, and from back in the hills came the tremolo note of a little owl. There had been a breeze at sunset, but it had fallen away to a soft sighing. It was all mighty different from the sort of evening song a town sings. There was no faintest murmur of the sound of human life; the only voice we heard was the voice of the wilderness. It wasn't unfriendly, but it was strange. I wondered what Laura was thinking of it—but I didn't want to ask.

Little Peggy dropped asleep in my arms and I put her to bed in the tent. After that we got to talking of to-morrow's plans and of what we would do first in the morning; but the talk lagged lamely and petered out. To be perfectly frank, for just a minute or two I was bothered. Had our plunge been too headlong? Life, particularly for the women, gets a good deal of its meaning from familiar things and intimate contacts and established relations. The friendships and loves of years are more than habit, particularly with the women. For a minute or two I pondered whether we had

HERE OUR LIFE BEGAN







done well. With the unfamiliar night about us, Omaha seemed just then very far away. I threw an armful of dry wood on the fire, to make it blaze up more cheerfully.

We heard the voices of people coming up the lane. They went through our camp presently, staring with curious interest—three solemn-faced hill folk, each with a gun hanging in the crook of his elbow. They didn't stop, but passed with a drawled "Ha-owdy!" The inflection can't be set upon paper. They went up to our tenant's house on the hill; and after a half hour or so they returned—not through the camp this time, but through the thicket on the far side of the hollow. When they were across from us a voice called:

"You-uns git that nigger out of hyar! Git him out to-morry, too, or he'll git killed!"

Wouldn't that have dashed you? Lee was rolled in a blanket, lying on the grass beyond the fire.

"Did you hear that, Lee?" I asked.

Lee chuckled. He was certainly a master hand at finding things to chuckle about. "If a nigger got killed," he said, "every time a pore white trash talks biggity, this worl' would be a

bad ba-ad place. It sho' would!" He chuckled himself to sleep over that.

We never heard anything from our first-night visitors. They never tried to pester our brunette. Maybe it's just as well they didn't. There's a sort of grim irony in the fact that Lee is "doing time" now for murder. Those night prowlers were merely making a little cheap noise; but that was our first taste of neighborliness in the new home. We didn't exactly like the flavor.

Morning came in a burst of brilliance, dewy-fresh, wonderful. You know how such mornings affect you; they make you forget how queerly your mind behaved in the night. When we talk about the Resurrection Morning, maybe it's a lot more than a figure of speech. The curl of blue wood-smoke from our breakfast fire rose unafraid in the sunlight; the birds that flitted and fluttered about sang a tune that was mighty different from the melancholy whimpering of the whippoorwill and the owl. We laughed and felt good.

After breakfast, Laura and I walked around here and there, stopping to loaf now and then, and talking. After all, though it chafed us sometimes like the mischief, it was a good thing



for us that the place was in the hands of the tenant that summer. That gave us time for getting acquainted with our land and letting the acquaintance ripen. Our eagerness would have led us into some follies, if we'd had a free hand. Some of those follies would have been expensive; and if we had tried cropping ourselves, knowing as little as we did of conditions and methods, we must have ended our first year with something of disappointment on the practical side of things. Since that time hundreds of back-to-the-landers, seeing our later success, have asked us for advice that might help them along in ventures of their own. When we advise, we rather insist upon one point. I may as well give it to you here:

If you've had no experience in running a farm, take your time through your first year. Don't plunge with your eyes shut. You'd better find a man to work with you. He needn't be a first-class farmer, though of course it's all the better if he's that; but he ought to be strong-backed, willing, tolerably good-tempered, and familiar with local conditions. Even if he isn't a genius, he'll teach you a lot of little tricks and handy ways. He'll know something about your neighbors, too; and

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when they come at you—as some of them surely will—trying to make a horse-trade with you, or sell you a second-hand wagon or some other piece of junk, your man will most likely be able to speak a quiet word in your ear that will save you no end of disgust with yourself. Besides, there'll be lots and lots of times when you'll be mighty glad to have a man around to talk to, a man who speaks in the vernacular of the farm. The chances are that, even with good luck, you won't get very far with actual farming in your first year. You'll really need that time for doing as we did—getting over your feeling of strangeness and making deliberate plans.

Laura and I sat upon the topmost rail of an old worm fence that morning for an hour or so and watched our tenant at his work. He was in his cornfield. Corn had been planted two or three weeks ago. We could see the pale green lines of the young seedlings zigzagging across the field. The crop was getting its first cultivation this morning. The man had no cultivator; he was working with a plow. A dinky little plow, it was, built pretty much on the lines of those you see in pictures of farming in the Holy Land or in barbarous Mexico.

I never could find out what a plow like that was supposed to do. It wasn't doing much of anything just then—merely bobbing and jerking and bumping along over the stones. One lean mule was pulling it, and the plowman clumped and stumbled in the rear, yanking on the lines and swearing in a hurt, despairing sort of way. The plow-point would strike a boulder buried just under the surface, go sliding and scraping over, then ram beneath another stone and stick there, pitching the handles into the air. Nine times in ten, when that happened, the handles would poke the plowman viciously in his short ribs. That seemed to make him very angry. How that does hurt! That's what he was swearing about; but his swearing sounded pitifully impotent, as if he was all out of breath.

"Oh foot!" he'd gasp at the mule in an exasperated treble. "You old fool you!" Then he'd yank at the lines, pull his plow-point from beneath the stone, and go jolting and bobbing and bumping along till he hit the next one. It was a continuous performance.

He'd used poor, cheap seed in planting his field, dropping it all by hand and covering it with a hand hoe. He'd got a very poor



"stand." On the other side of the field his wife and three or four kids were replanting the vacant spaces—chopping little holes with heavy hoes, dropping a few grains in each hole, and chopping the earth back over them. It was very primitive, terribly laborious. Across the width of the field we could hear the clink and rasp of the hoes against the stones at every slow, painful stroke. It wasn't much like the farming we'd been used to watching up in the prairie country. It appeared as if time had turned back a hundred years under our eyes.

When we had looked on a while, Laura gave a little exclamation. "Can that land ever be really farmed?" she said.

I laughed. I've found out that there's nothing better than a laugh for disguising dismay. "Oh, yes!" I said. "We'll have to get some of that stone picked up first. We'll need the stone, anyway, when it comes to building."

You'll notice that I've mentioned stone several times. That ground was certainly stony. Exceedingly stony—pile up the adverbs to suit yourself; you can hardly overdo it. On some of the field the soil showed through the stones only in spots. Truly, it was a tough-looking piece of ground.

After a year or two we discovered that it wasn't nearly so bad as it looked. You ought to see that same field to-day, with the straight, smooth lines of the young corn ribboning across it. I'm not joking. If you wanted a stone to throw at a marauding pig or a stray pup, you'd have to hunt around. But there's no use talking; that cornfield did look rocky on that first morning.

When we got down to it, the cause of the trouble wasn't hard to find. The farm had been homesteaded in 1847, and since that time it had led a life of vicissitudes. That's a tough old word—vicissitudes; but it's no tougher than the facts. Once in its history, and only once, it had been a pretty well-kept farm; but that was fifty years ago. Since that time it had suffered absolute neglect, or worse. Yes, there is something worse than downright neglect. The farming of tenants like ours is a sight worse. This farm had known years and years of such mishandling with crude tools and still cruder understanding.

That surface stone was an accumulation of half a century. Year by year, little by little it had been turned up from the subsoil. The rains of year after year had washed the loose

soil from around it, leaving it bare. Once in a while, when the bowlders absolutely blocked plowing, the largest of them would be thrown up into piles at ragged intervals through the field; and there the piles would lie. After that the plowman would work around them; and gradually a tangle of wild growths would convert them into ragged, unsightly mounds. Between the mounds the shallow scratching of the plow over the uneven surface left a multitude of little runways for the waters of occasional flooding rains—and there were the three brook-channels, waiting to bear away the tons upon tons of earth that every torrent washed down to them. I hate to think of the wealth of good soil that's been washed off these fields and lost in the course of fifty years. Since we began picking up the stone and using it to build walls for saving the washed soil—but let me get to that after a while, when the time comes. I'm crowding things.

Besides the vast litter of stone, the field held a ragged army of huge stumps—walnut and oak. They were so big and so burly that in half a hundred years they had only half rotted out. Sitting on the fence that morning, we counted forty or fifty of them standing around.



With their spreading roots, every one of them took up at least a hundred square feet of ground—enough ground in the total to support four hundred hills of corn. There isn't one of those stumps left to-day; we got rid of the last of them two years ago, with dynamite. Our tenant that year harvested his oats in part with an old-fashioned hand "cradle," and in part with a fussy little sickle. Stones and stumps forbade the use of any modern implement. We're harvesting our grain on that very same land with sure-enough farm implements. Working between whiles, in idle times, it has cost us about five dollars an acre to bring that land from the old state to the new; and that cost has been paid back to us, many times over, in increased crop yields.

I've halted my story to tell you this, because this seemed to be as good a place as any for saying it. On that May morning six years ago, as we perched on the fence and watched the circus our tenant was making for us, it needed cheerful optimism and something of clear vision to look across the time to come and see a real farm where all that ugly disorder lay. Laura is one of these natural-born optimists. Do you know how to recognize one



of them? Let me tell you: When they face an apparently hopeless state of facts, they don't put on an air of forced resignation and begin to talk in pretty platitudes about keeping up a good heart and trusting in Providence. None of that. They start to humming a saucy tune and begin to talk about something else.

Laura hummed a bar or two of "Rock-a-bye, Baby," and slipped down from her seat. "Come on," she said, "let's go and have a look at the place where the house will stand."

If you want to know it, that spot was a hard looker. In the old days, long ago, this had been the site of a big, comfortable farmhouse. Later, as we got into our work of cleaning up, we came upon broken heaps of brick and stone from the ruined walls and chimneys; but there was nothing of that showing at a hasty glance. For a long, long time this had been a waste place. It was littered with the inevitable stone piles, grown up in a wilderness so dense that a cottontail could hardly have worried through it. Do you remember the Kipling story of "Letting in the Jungle"? That's what had happened on this hillock. Wild growths innumerable—blackberry canes and hawthorn,

oak and elm and hickory scrub, wild plum bush and buck-brush, grapevines and thorny smilax —seemed to have worked themselves into a frenzy trying to smother out and hide every vestige and token of the home that had once been. To-day we have that spot looking like a park; but it certainly did look like Billy-be-Blowed that morning.

“Let’s see,” I said: “The house measures seventy-two feet across the south front. We’d better mark the southeast corner first, where your room will be.”

Very gravely Laura stooped, groping in the matted growth. She found three smooth, flat stones and laid them up, one upon the other, as a monument. By and by, when we built the house, we put the southeast corner exactly there.

“Now,” I said, “that’s all right. Now let’s see if I can sort of run the lines for the rest of it.”

Scrambling over stone-heaps, thrusting the brush aside, crushing a way through, I worked across to the western side, measuring it by paces as well as I was able. Standing at the extreme ends, we could barely see each other through the tangle. I was out of breath; my

hands and face were scratched and bleeding. I worried my way back to Laura's side.

"It's going to be a fine, large house!" I said. "I swear, I didn't know that seventy-two feet could take you so far from anywhere."

She laughed and began to help me pick the thorns out of my hands. "And it's sixty-six feet from front to back," she reminded me. "Do you know what we're going to build our fine, large house of?"

"Why, yes," I said. "We've talked that all over, haven't we? Heavy stone foundations and stone chimneys, and heavy log walls. I haven't changed my mind about that; have you?"

"Can you tell how much material it's going to take?" she asked.

"Why, no," I said. "Not exactly. Pretty soon, when we have time, we'll get somebody to sit down with us and sort of figure it out. Anyway, there ought to be stone enough right here; and there ought to be logs enough up there on the woods forty."

"We'll need a few boards, too, besides the logs," Laura said. "And the house ought to be shingled. And we'll need a barn, and some chicken houses, and a well, and some fencing,



and a few odds and ends like that. Have you any idea what it's going to cost?"

She wasn't talking like that just to show a mean disposition. Practical people have to talk so, every once in a while, to keep from seeming too much like other people.

I hadn't the least notion as to what it might cost. "Never mind," I said. "We'll start to figuring around on that, so soon as we get settled."

There the proposition stood for three months. I don't mean to say that we didn't do some thinking in that time. We thought and schemed and planned, and gathered data, and discussed ways and means every day and every hour; but at the end of the three months we were apparently not a step nearer to a final settlement of the matter than on the day we took possession of the place. What do you think about that? If you happen to be a cautious, conservative business man, instead of one who has spent most of his life writing fiction and making things come out right on paper for the people in his stories, I dare say it strikes you as utterly ridiculous. But if you were on the place to-day and could see how it has worked out, just exactly according to that

first fond vision, you might take a notion to do your pooh-poohing under your breath.

If home is no great shakes without a mother, neither is a farm without a cow. Our tenant had no cow. He argued that a cow would be a needless extravagance; for he and his folks ate sorghum molasses on their bread, and they drank creek water instead of coffee. But we'd grown used to keeping a cow, and we wanted a cow now. We argued with the tenant that every farm ought to have a cow on it for decorative effect, even if the farmer didn't use milk or cream or butter. He gave his consent that we might keep one, if we'd keep her tied up somewhere along the creek-bottom and not let her muss up his crops. So that afternoon we went over to a neighboring farm and bought a cow.

We gave thirty-five dollars for her, and she was a good one for sure—we knew enough about cows to be able to make sure of that. She was a black Jersey, three years old, eligible to registry, gentle as a plump kitten. After I got her home, I spent the rest of the afternoon with an ax, clearing out the undergrowth along the creek, to make a place for pasturing her on a tether. Bluegrass and clover stood

knee-deep on that low ground; it hadn't been pastured at all before our coming. Within twenty-four hours of the time we pitched our tent we had something started—an animal converting waste into something of value. It didn't strike us in just that way then; we hadn't thought so far ahead; but there, in miniature, was the whole scheme of our later work in farming. What we thought about then was just the solid satisfaction of having a gallon of yellow milk to drink for supper, with a couple of gallons more set away in the spring, making cream for breakfast. We would have chickens, too, in a day or so; we had shipped our flock from the old home. And so soon as we could find a little space for it somewhere we meant to start a bit of garden, just to keep our hands in.

It rained that night. When it rains in the Ozark country in the springtime, it rains. There was no stormy wind, no uproar, but only a steady, sluicing downpour that set our little corner all afloat in no time. The tent wasn't proof against it; it spattered through upon us in a thick, fine mist, drenching us. We tried making canopies of the bedclothes, sitting up in bed and holding them over our heads; but



that didn't work at all. Everything was wringing wet. In the middle of the night we turned out and ran for the empty granary. That shelter was just a degree or two better than none. The chinking was gone from the rough log walls, and the roof was shingled with homemade oak "shakes," now pretty well rotted away. The place wasn't dry, not by a long chalk. We sat on bundles of old corn fodder laid upon the floor where the leaks were least, drew our knees up under our chins and held umbrellas over us. It wasn't the least bit like living in town. If we had only thought so, we'd have been very uncomfortable; but it didn't seem to occur to us. In her corner I heard Laura making jokes with little Peggy. They were laughing together and "making believe" under their umbrella. Pretty soon Laura began to quote verse: ". . . and the cares that infest the day shall fold their tents . . ." Then Mother told us some stories of the days of her girlhood in the Cumberland hills of Pennsylvania—tales of real hardship bravely borne, in a time when that country, too, was half wild. There was no going to sleep any more that night.

It didn't matter. We didn't want to go to

sleep, anyway. We were feeling pretty rollicky. It isn't all of life to be under a watertight roof. If you happen to have the slant of mind that lets you take things as they come, just as if you believed they were meant to be that way, you can have a lot of fun that other folks miss.

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### III

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YOU mustn't get it into your mind that our intentions weren't serious as to actual practical farming at Happy Hollow. There are spots in what I've written that might lead you to mistake us for a happy-go-lucky pair of amateurs, interested mainly in doing some artistic tricks on our land, but not deeply concerned over the matter of turning the land into a successful, profit-making farm. I haven't been dwelling much upon that part of the proposition.

Our first desire was to make our ideal home at Happy Hollow; but we were bent also upon making a real farm. To put it bluntly, we had to make our acres do something for us, in a substantial way, or we couldn't afford to keep them for very long. Running a farm that doesn't pay, just for the fun of it, is pretty expensive sport. If there's a balance on the right side at the year's end, though it's only a little, the farmer may hang on hopefully; but



if he has to rustle to make up a deficit every year, though it's only a small one, he's on the anxious seat. Running a farm is exactly like any other business in that particular: Once it has started downhill and has begun to eat up more than it produces, it's time to consider. A badly managed farm can produce a deficit with greater ease than the average farmer himself seems to understand.

We weren't going at our farming indifferent to the outcome. Neither did we intend to trust to luck. We meant to make farming pay if we could, for we needed the money; and we knew well enough that to get the result we wanted we should have to practice good farming. To get results that would appear to us satisfactory, we should have to beat the average farmer.

We had taken the precaution to study a soil-survey map of the Fayetteville section. The map showed that our land was naturally of a good type—not of the highest fertility, but a good sandy loam with a strong red clay subsoil. The abuses of bad farming had put it in a condition that would make it hard to handle for a while, until it might be smoothed out; but abuse could not altogether destroy

its usefulness. After the fashion of tenant farmers everywhere, the tenants on this place, in addition to slovenly methods, had exhausted the natural supply of decaying vegetable matter in the upper soil, so that the surface would bake and "crust" badly after rains. Besides, this humus is, as even the kindergartens teach nowadays, quite necessary to plant growth.

There are many ways of getting humus into a depleted soil; but they all simmer down to one easy rule: You must put it there. It's like the kids' saying: "What goes up must come down." If you waste humus by allowing your soil to wash, by burning refuse instead of plowing it under, or by persistent cropping, and do nothing to renew the supply, the time is bound to come when you won't have any humus. That's just a little more obvious than the well advertised fact that two and two make four. That's practically the sum and substance of the "worn out farm" bugaboo, north or south, east or west. This isn't the place for an argument about the theory of it.

It would be hard to find a "worn out farm" anywhere that couldn't be made as good or better than it ever was by patience, perseverance and prudence. It's not to be accomplished

overnight. There's no get-rich-quick way of doing it. Nature will do it herself if you'll give her time and let her alone. You may beat Nature's time if you'll put your mind to it; but you must follow her methods. Nature has a patent on the manufacture of humus; that's why.

Well, then, we had a naturally good farm that had become unnaturally poor. Two things were to be done in reforming it. We had to clean up the surface, getting rid of stone and stumps and such-like litter, so that we might really cultivate our fields. That would take time and muscle. Then we had to get humus into the soil. That would take time and muscle—plus some thinking.

The state university at Fayetteville includes the Arkansas Agricultural College. We went over there and began to pester the professors. We talked with the chemists, and the horticulturists, and the agronomists, and the animal husbandry men, and every other man who looked or acted like an expert in anything. If we missed anybody in those interviews it was because he saw us coming and hid. They were certainly a fine lot of men. If the farmers of the United States, whose work is all at sixes



and sevens, only knew of the help that awaits them at the great schools of farming, there would be another story to tell of husbandry. Little by little, during that summer, our problem was simplified and the rough draft of a definite plan was made. The tangled mess of fractions we started with was reduced to its simplest terms; the rather vague confusion of enthusiasms and questionings and uncertainties we had at the beginning was boiled down to a concrete idea.

When we talked with one of the professors, I asked a question that had been lingering in the back of my head since our first encounter with our tenant and since we had first watched him at his work:

“The man who’s working that farm now says we’re bound to starve to death if we depend upon farming it for a living. He looks pretty lean himself. We’ve never tried it; but we know that starvation would have its drawbacks. What about that? Is there a fighting chance of making a farm like that support a family decently?”

He met the question gravely, as if that proposition had long since lost any suggestion of humor for him.

"If that land of yours is properly farmed," he said, "it can be made to produce more pounds of pork or beef to the acre, at less cost per pound, than the best farm in Nebraska or Iowa. That difference isn't all in the soil, though. It's mostly in our longer growing season and the greater range of crops we're able to use in meat production. We've shown that in our demonstration work here. That ought to answer your question."

That did. Just to clinch the matter, he showed us the facts and figures in the demonstration. There was no getting away from them. They must have satisfied anybody.

"Well, that's all right, then," I said. "Now I'd like to visit some of the farmers around here who are doing that sort of thing in practice. I'd like to see how closely they're following your methods in getting their results. If you'll give me the names of a few of them, we'll go to see them." And I got out my notebook and pencil.

He hesitated for a moment. "Put up your book," he said. "There aren't any names to give you." If he'd been anybody but a teacher, I think he'd have looked discouraged; but teachers have no business with discourage-

ment. He contented himself with a mild-sounding reflection: "We can tell what's going on in the soil, but we can't tell what's going on in the minds of the farmers. They don't seem to be even interested in what we're doing, to say nothing of being interested in trying to do the same things themselves. Take the matter of clover, for instance. Come over and see our demonstration patches." We saw as fine clover as a bee ever buzzed over. "Yet you'll hear the farmers saying that clover can't be grown here," our professor said. "I doubt if there's one farmer in fifty, right in this district, who's ever so much as seen our clover, though this is a public institution, conducted for the farmers' special benefit. It's the same way with alfalfa, and the vetches, and soy beans, and all the rest of that list. They grow cowpeas a little; but there isn't one acre of cowpeas planted where there ought to be a thousand. The item of greatest importance in farming these soils is altogether left out of the farmer's practice. That's why the farms look so lean—and a lean farm makes lean farmers."

After those talks we would go out home and sit on the fence some more and watch our man at his job, figuring him out. One thing was



very plain: His trouble wasn't bodily laziness. Every day and every day he was out in the morning early; and all day long, till darkness stopped him, he worked at the very limit of his strength. No man could have put in longer, harder hours. Yet, as the season advanced, it was plain as print that he wasn't getting anywhere; he seemed to be just standing on one spot and turning dizzily round and round. By the middle of the summer he was buying chops and baled hay for his mules, going in debt for the stuff, expecting to pay the debt out of his half of the crop. But there wasn't going to be any crop worth mentioning, though the season had been an extra favorable one, with plenty of rain falling at exactly the right times. The cornstalks were dwarfed and pale, with half their ears mere "nubbins"; the patches of wheat looked like the patent-medicine pictures of "before taking." The wheat harvest was in mid-June. Those patches harvested six bushels to the acre, and the yield of straw was hardly enough to stuff a bedtick. Everything else on the place figured out in just about that way.

The tenant sold his half of the wheat at harvest for seventy cents a bushel. That gave him

two dollars and ten cents an acre. Counting only his own labor at one dollar a day, and saying nothing of the "keep" of his team or the cost of thrashing, that wheat crop spelled a net loss. His corn gave him twelve bushels to the acre—six bushels for his share. His own labor on the crop at a dollar a day more than ate it up, to say nothing of the time of his mules and his wife and kids.

That didn't appear very satisfactory to us. And only occasionally, as we rode around the country that summer, did we see a farm that was making a much better showing. Shiftlessness might account for some of this, but it wasn't the only nor even the chief explanation. Nine-tenths of the farmers working within rifle shot of the agricultural college were doing no thinking, making no plans for any improvement in their methods. Some of them knew much better, but they stuck to the outworn old ways stubbornly. An ox in a treadmill is no more a victim of routine than these workers seemed to be.

One day I repeated to our professor-friend the impression I'd received when I first looked on at our own tenant's work—that I felt as

though I were looking on at something that might have happened a century ago.

"You might as well make it forty centuries, while you're about it," he said. "Except that their tools are made of iron and steel, instead of wood and stone, the work of the farmers hasn't changed much in that time. I'm not hopeless about it, though. We're getting hold of the youngsters, a few at a time. They're learning; and when they go to farming they'll teach the others better than we can. It'll come out all right in the end."

But we didn't want to wait for the end. So bit by bit through that summer, as we had seen our house plans grow through the years, a plan was made for the farm. We have stuck to that plan. Some of the details have changed from time to time, as our understanding has been broadened by experience; but the idea remains to-day as it was six years ago.

The essence of it is this: First of all, the farm must furnish food for our own table—not in a roundabout way, mind you, but directly. Ninety per cent. of the farmers in our neighborhood were supplying their tables from the "store"—buying canned stuff, buying flour and meal and potatoes and salt meat, buying



practically everything they ate. The only way they had of paying their store bills was by selling their corn and wheat—which they had grown at a considerable net loss. Only a few of the farmers knew how to put up sugar-cured ham and bacon. Gardening seemed to be a lost art. Dairying on the farms, for the sake of securing abundant home supplies of dairy products, was next to unknown. If there were hens on a farm, the surplus eggs were exchanged at the store for meat; or if there happened to be a little “jag” of potatoes, this was swapped for butter. In all our going about we didn’t run across one farm that was doing for itself, at first hand, all it was able to do in feeding the farmer’s family.

We intended to change that. No matter how much of our land it would take, we meant to make the farm furnish our table directly with milk and cream and butter, the best of meat, poultry and eggs, fruits and garden stuff. Our land must do that for us in the end; so, we argued, why not let it be done directly? In quality and cost we could do better for ourselves in that way than if we got our food second-handed. The largest item in the cost of

living must be taken care of first, and in a way that insured the greatest possible economy.

The rest of our land—if there happened to be any left—we planned to devote to the growing of grain and forage crops to be fed to livestock on the farm, so that whatever we might have to sell, in the course of time, would leave the farm in the most highly finished form. When you figure it all out, taking everything into account—labor, interest and taxes, loss of fertility, and the rest of the items—the average farmer who raises hay and corn to sell loses money by it. Hogs and cattle were to eat our crops at Happy Hollow.

There was the plan we made, talking it over between ourselves and with the college folk, and reading everything we could find that would help us toward our end. The further we got into it, the clearer it became to us that we had undertaken a life-size task. Next year wouldn't see much of a change, nor maybe the year after that, in our yields of field crops. That was bound to take time. But at any rate we'd have the farm established on the right basis.

That first merry month of May was a mighty moist month. Night after night it

rained and rained. After a week or so it became just the least bit in the world monotonous to sit up all night with umbrellas over our heads to keep off the drip of the leaky roof—and monotony, you know, grows tiresome by and by. You can stand for a lot of disagreeable things if there's the tang of variety in them; but when that's gone they become flat and stale and unprofitable. We began to hanker for a tight roof over us and a dry bed.

We weren't yet ready to figure on the big house; but we built the henhouse and moved into that for a while. It was well made, roomy, screened, and comfortable—a sight better than any of the homes on the farms surrounding us. We got leave of our tenant to build this house on the knoll where our real home would stand after a while, if we wouldn't let it lap over on his cleared land. We had to hack out a place for it in the heart of the thicket. I did that myself, working with brush-hook and ax, and then Lee and I did the carpentering. Neither of us knew beans about framing a building, but we got along. It beats all what you'll think you can't do till you try. Since that time I've done all sorts of things around the farm, from well-digging to practicing obstetrics in the pig



lots, till now I'm ready to tackle just any kind of a job offhand, with serene confidence in the outcome. To my way of thinking, that's the best thing about farm work—you've got to be prepared for all manner of emergencies that you can't possibly prepare for. Maybe that sounds like an absurdity, but it isn't.

Well, anyway, we built our chicken house. We took our time to it; but when it was finished we had a kitchen, a dining room, and a big bedroom; and the roof didn't leak—much. Instead of a campfire, Laura had a kitchen range to do her cooking. We set up our tent under a big tree for a sitting room or an overflow bedroom; we cleared the undergrowth from a few square rods of ground beside the house and put up a big swing; we cleared out a temporary shelter for the chickens in a wild-plum thicket near by; we staked out our cow—and there we were! Happy? Yes, we were happy. We'd secured a foothold.

The jungle came right up to our doors. Sitting in the house, we couldn't see anything at all but a wall of matted growths. Inquisitive little gray and brown birds would come flitting out of the tangle, teeter on the long, swaying blackberry canes, and peek in at the windows,

scolding us. They grew friendly before the end of summer. Little green lizards would flash about the walls or lie basking in the sunlight on our very doorstones, cocking their impudent heads slantwise and studying us with gold-rimmed, jewel-bright eyes. We scraped acquaintance with cottontails and pretty striped snakes that sought the warmth of our clearing; and once we found a fat 'possum curled up snugly in a hen's nest. All through the summer we rubbed elbows with wild things.

From that first lodgment we widened our circle, clearing and cleaning up, fighting the thickets back. It was slow work and raw work, work that took us right back to first principles. There are no compromises in that kind of an undertaking. If there's a big stone to be moved, there's nothing else to do but to move it; if there's a tree to come down, you must simply go to work and chop it down. I liked that; I haven't yet got over liking it. In a day like ours, with life made up so largely of expedients and subterfuges and makeshifts, there's real value in tackling a rough, primitive task. When you've won out at it, there's no discount on your winning. There's no least

element of luck in it; it shows for just what it is. It's real.

Lee wasn't passionately fond of it, though. He found it humdrum. His genius didn't run that way. In those days all the genius he had was spent in inventing innocent-seeming ways of getting out of my sight in the brush, so that he might lie down and sleep. When he was gone, by and by I found a sleeping nest he'd made for himself, back in a clump of scrub oaks, screened in by thick hawthorn bush and lined with dry sedge grass. Sleep was with him an obsession. In the middle of a warm day when I'd see the little beads of sweat starting out on his forehead, I'd know to a moral certainty that he'd be drowsing off presently, no matter what he was doing. Once, when we were setting fence posts around a little clearing we wanted to use for pasture, we took turns swinging the big post maul—one driving and one steadying the post under the strokes. When his turn came to drive, I give you my word he managed to snatch a nap between strokes. When I went to the pile for another post, I found him stretched out on the grass and snoring; and when we'd set the sharpened nose of the new post and I hauled off for the



first lick, he rolled over on his back and slept again, taking the post with him, holding it clasped in his arms. He was right good at that.

I had other help from time to time—some of the “hill billies.” There were lots of them living around us then, in little huts cuddled down in sheltering nooks on the hillsides. Do you remember Charles Egbert Craddock’s stories of the Tennessee mountaineers? They might have been written of our people. We got along with ours first rate, on the whole, though we looked at the shield always from opposite sides. My definition of Work wasn’t in their dictionary at all. Their notion of a day’s work consisted in leaning on an ax handle and conversing, or squatting on a fallen log and conversing, or settling their shoulders comfortably against a tree trunk and conversing. If I came within talking distance of one of them in the clearing, I had a conversation on my hands forthwith. They couldn’t make us out at all—couldn’t understand what folly we were up to. Those of them who linger in the country to-day—there are only a scattering few of them left—can’t understand what we’ve been driving at all these years, even with the visible signs be-

fore their eyes. Happy Hollow is a rank violation of all native traditions.

As we worked with the clearing through the spring and early summer, we were thinking of the big house. I had made up my mind that it would be built, somehow, before winter. One fact disturbed me a little: We knew we had stone enough at hand for every use in our building, and we had expected to find that our forty-acre woodlot carried timber enough for logs for the house walls. We were disappointed there. The lumbermen had raked these woods clean of sound timber before our day, and the new growth wasn't yet far enough along for use. We had to give that plan up.

As things turned out, we were better off for that seeming disappointment. Our standing luck had brought us a builder—a man who sensed exactly what we were after. Shivers run through me sometimes when I think of what might have happened if we hadn't stumbled upon that chap—but, then, we did! He not only understood; he sympathized, which was worlds better. We had long sessions with him, sitting in the shade of our big wild-cherry tree, working out bills of material, discussing details. Our man was engaged for the job be-

fore the discussions were over. It was not to be a "contract" job, with a lump sum in payment. I was to buy all materials and pay for all labor by the day; our builder would find the men and engage to keep them at their work, seeing that we got our money's worth. We trusted him. The work went through from first to last without a bobble.

The bills of lumber bashed me a bit, remembering the cost of lumber at the retail yards at Omaha. The log walls of the house alone, which were to be six inches thick, would take the equivalent of 22,500 board feet; and there were a couple of carloads of other stuff to be got—sills, and joists, and framing material, and flooring and roofing, to say nothing of shingles; and our idea called for a multitude of oak and cypress doors and windows which would have to be built to our order. If we had to buy all this from the trade, even at the lower retail prices that ruled in Arkansas, our money wouldn't see us through. We had to find some other way.

I went into the pine country in the lower part of the state, two hundred miles below Fayetteville, and began rooting around through the woods, scraping acquaintance with the saw-



mill men. I found lots of little mills scattered around—free lances in the great lumber world. The men who owned these mills made a living by buying a scrap of timber too small for the big fellows to bother with and selling their cut to the larger companies. It was precarious business, for they had to squeak through on the narrowest margin of profit that would let them keep a-going.

With one of these men I spent some time, camping with him, figuring with him. He agreed to cut my logs and timbers and rough lumber at the price the big mills were paying him—nine dollars a thousand feet, delivered at the nearest railway station. A small free-lance planing mill at that station would surface my stuff and load it on cars for one dollar a thousand feet. Pine lumber could be shipped from there to Fayetteville on a fifteen-cent rate. The surfacing, by reducing weight, would save more than its cost in freight. I would get what the lumbermen called “mill-run” stuff, taking it just as it came from the saw, with the culls and “shakes” thrown out. That is to say, I would get about forty per cent. of what the trade knows as Number

One, and sixty per cent. of Number Two. That's what I did get.

I made my contract for everything our building would require that that mill could cut—three carloads. Those three carloads cost me \$588.71; the freight charges to Fayetteville came to \$235.35. The funny little mill was tearing and snorting away at top speed on my stuff before I started back home. I had my “feet wet” now, for sure!

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## IV

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WE kept Christmas in our blessed farmhouse at Happy Hollow, before our great stone fireplace that was banked high, from hearth to throat, with a roaring blaze of huge logs from our woodlot. It needed the strength of two men to carry in the backlog. I had helped to cut those logs, working with crosscut saw and heavy ax in the woods; I had helped to load them on the woodrack and haul them down to the house over the rough, stony road. Every stone in the massive front of the fireplace Laura herself had found for the hands of the builders, tramping over the hills, choosing them carefully. The finished work was very beautiful in its rich, soft grays and browns and reds and in its appearance of fine, solid strength. What's more, it was ours, achieved at last after eighteen years of waiting. When I'm an old man, by and by, and sit basking in the warmth of that hearth, brooding, I'll remember the fierce exultation that thrilled me as I knelt and



kindled that first fire on that Christmas eve, watching the little golden flames leap into life and flicker and crackle and rise at last, roaring up the chimney. It was the lighting of our altar fire. We loved it.

After that, when little Peggy had been tucked in bed, my boy and I brought in her Christmas tree and set it up—a shapely cedar we had found near the house. Its slender point stretched up to brush the rafters of the high arched roof. We hung it thick with tinsel strings, and silver and gold stars, and gay cornucopias, and pink-sugared homemade cookies, and all manner of little gifts. When that was done, we sat before our fire and were content.

The house was an accomplished fact. It was the desire of a lifetime realized. It seemed to have been wrought as by a sort of magic. In two months from the time the builders began their work, the walls had risen and the roof had covered them. There had been not a hair's breadth of change from our plans—no compromise for depressing economy's sake. Back of the house, at the foot of our knoll, stood a huge barn, sheltering our farm horses and our half dozen cows; and the chickens and the pigs



FOR THE CHRISTMAS FIRE





were comfortably housed. A storm blew that night, with a driving snow that drifted and curled about the house. The ground was white in the morning when we looked out of the windows across the swelling hills. Oh, it was a great Christmas!

Our builder had done his work with rare judgment and skill, as no man of hidebound understanding could have done it. It was not a case for following traditions of the trade; our plans violated more traditions than they kept. A man without understanding might easily have ruined us in trying to carry them out; but as it was we had kept within our limit of cost, and we had got exactly what we wanted.

The logs for the walls had been squared on the saw to a uniform size of six by eight inches. Three sides had been surfaced on the planer, leaving the fourth side rough. With simple framing and strong mortising at the corners the logs were laid in tiers with "broken joints," each tier being tied to the one below it with twelve-inch spikes driven through. The chinks between the logs were filled with cement, so that when the walls were completed they were as one solid piece. Two huge stone chimneys

rose above the wide-eaved roof, providing an open fire in every room in the house but the kitchen. After more than five years there is nothing we would change.

Don't misunderstand. The house wasn't finished in all its detail. It isn't yet finished. Even with unlimited money we shouldn't have tried to hurry full final accomplishment. Purposely many things had been left for the slow, deliberate, thoughtful after-touch. Walls and ceilings were to be done in solid paneling of native hardwoods by and by, when we had time to study out the effects we wanted—and money to pay for the work. There must be no incautious haste in determining the lines of arch and nook and corner. Wide porches were to be added, too, and a pergola was to be built at the south. The lines of these must fit harmoniously with the lines of roof and wall. Driveways and walls were to be laid out, flowing into harmony with the house and its surroundings. There was no end of things to be done in the fullness of time. A home must grow and ripen. No amount of money, though it be spent with any degree of mad impatience, will do the work of time in that growth and ripening. We knew that. Our

children's children will find their part of the work awaiting them in giving beauty to Happy Hollow. That's our idea of the making of a home. We had made no more than a beginning; but we were content, for the beginning was flawless.

Labor cost in this building had been just next to nothing. To write the figures seems to be making a jest of the matter—as if the job must have been “scamped” and crude. It wasn't. Our master builder drew three dollars a day—and he worked as one of the carpenters. The other woodworkers were paid two dollars a day, and the mason four dollars. Sometimes, when he could use them to advantage, the boss would have half a dozen men working with him; at other times he would use only two or three. He knew how to keep his crew keyed up and every man interested in what he was doing. There wasn't a “grouch” amongst them. Most likely Laura was responsible for the unvarying good temper of the men; she cooked for them while they were at work. You know how that helps.

I doubt if our performance might be duplicated, in the matter of low cost, in any other state on the map; but the long and short of it



is that materials and labor for our building cost us all told only about \$2,000. For this money we had our big house, our huge barn, a three-room cottage for a farm hand, a log storeroom and laundry building, our poultry houses, and some odds and ends of sheds and shelters. We certainly got our money's worth. But for our defiance of some of the traditions, the cost might have been three or four times as great.

Plans for our first season of real farm work went ahead through that winter with no end of eagerness but with a finger always on the throttle to check wasteful expenditure. The more we studied our proposition the more clearly we understood that we must go slow for a year or two in building up our fields and getting them fit for real farming. We had no money to waste through letting our eagerness run away with our prudence.

Looking over the accounts of that first year, I can't put my finger on an item of real loss. Had we been experienced farmers of the old school instead of book farmers of the new order, we'd have spent our money differently, to be sure; but as I see it we shouldn't have got so satisfactory a return upon our outlay. It's

the disposition of the old farmer to spend no money in farming unless he thinks he'll get it back again out of the current year's harvest. That's what you might call slot-machine farming. A plan of operations that postpones profits for two or three years, even though it makes profits more certain in the end, isn't popular with the old-time practical farmer. But that was our plan.

Our idea, carefully worked out, was that every dollar spent in cleaning up and smoothing out our land would not only guarantee better crop yields in the years to come, but would give us our money back through increased value of the land itself. The cost of hauling a load of stone from the fields and building it into a retaining wall to check the washing of our soil we looked upon as a part of our permanent investment. Besides, we argued, the efficiency of labor applied to crop-growing on the cleaned fields must be greatly increased. We should have the greater efficiency of modern implements, which couldn't be used on those stone patches; and we must inevitably get better harvests. It wasn't a one-year game we were playing; but we couldn't see how we could possibly lose.

Judge whether we judged well. Farmed in the old way through the old years, the value of this land—its selling value, I mean—had stood stock still for a generation; its intrinsic value—its fertility value—was growing steadily less and less. If the old conditions had persisted, the land wouldn't sell for a nickel more to-day than we gave for it six years ago. Handled according to our early plan, the market value has jumped from \$20 to \$100 an acre. If we wanted to, we could sell out to-day for \$100 an acre, plus the cost of our buildings. The increase in intrinsic or cropping value of the land has been still more marked; our crop yields now are half a dozen times what they used to be at their best—and the limit of that increase isn't yet in sight. Of course cropping methods have had a great deal to do with making the increased yields; but the point is that the better methods wouldn't have been possible on the old fields.

You can see that it's pretty hard to separate the money we've spent into operating expenses proper and permanent investment. I doubt if that's possible on any farm; the two are so closely interwoven that they react one upon the other in a hundred ways. No matter about



the bookkeeping part just now. However the charges may be sifted out, you will see that our dollars have come back to us, over and over again. It's just as plain that some of our dollars had to be put in with no expectation of getting them back again from this year's harvest, or next year's, or the next. All we could feel sure of was that they would come back to us in good time, many fold.

This sounds a little bit over-sure, maybe, as if we claimed to have made our plan with a sort of infallible foresight, free of all error. Don't take it that way. Our work has been marked by nothing so much as freedom of change in details. We've changed in matters of detail as often as we've found we were mistaken—and that's been very often. It's only our central idea that has persisted, unchanged. That's not subject to change, because it's right.

Through the first winter, whenever it was possible, we were cutting brush and cleaning out fence-rows and corners, to square up our fields. When we got the farm the fields were shapeless; wherever one of them edged up to a rough place, there it would stop. The farm was gashed and torn with unsightly hollows and steep banks and rain-washed gullies; the

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old rail fences yawed and zigzagged drunkenly back and forth. We tore out all the fences at the beginning of our work, to straighten their lines; and we changed from rails to woven wire in rebuilding. It was a rough, heavy task, that first one. Between whiles, for variety, we hauled stone.

Hundreds and hundreds of wagonloads of stone went off those fields in their first cleaning. Just for the fun of it, I'd like to know how many tons of stone we strained and grunted over in the course of those months. I felt as if it must be running well up into the millions. It was the first time in my life that I'd pitted myself against a job that called for sheer brute strength and that seemed to have no end. Week after week I couldn't see that we were making any headway at all; I was almost ready to believe that stone breeds and multiplies by some uncanny process. We strained and grunted and hauled, and still there was stone. It didn't strike me so just then, but that was mighty good discipline. It begat patience, and it begat thoroughness. Once we'd started on the job, we doggedly wouldn't quit till it was finished.

The hardest part of it all was in finding help.

I'd been used to thinking of the farmers' complaints about hired men as just one of the standing jokes—like the mother-in-law joke. Let me tell you, it's no joke at all. The only real loss we've had at Happy Hollow is represented by the stubs of my checks that went to pay the wages of lazy dawdlers who palmed themselves off on me as farm hands. Lee, my Kansas brunette, had petered out so soon as the real work began. After that I tried out a string of others; and one after another they too petered out. There was nothing in particular the matter with any one of them; there was just a general indisposition to work. I've never been a fussy boss; and I was offering better wages than any other farmer in the neighborhood was paying; but I drew blank after blank. The idea of putting in a full six-day week at farm work, summer and winter, was shockingly new. Generations of practice here in the hills had bred a habit of "laying by" a little jag of a crop in midsummer and taking the rest of the year easy, with an odd job now and then under pressure of extreme need. My notions were to my "hands" only vanity and vexation. They couldn't see the sense of working all the time when three days'



pay a week would keep them in cornmeal and salt meat; so three days' work a week was about all I got out of the best of them—until Sam came along, by and by.

Sam didn't belong in this part of the country. He just "blew in" from the hills of Southern Missouri, where farming conditions are pretty much like the conditions of the Fayetteville section. He was used to rough land, used to stone and timber, and used to handling the tools that would bring order out of such chaos as our farm was in. He wasn't of native stock; he was an Irishman with a fine set of arms and legs and shoulders—a big six-footer with a back of oak, an ineradicable grin, and a fairly unhuman passion for work. He's been with me a little more than five years now. My hat's off to him. He's been a sort of godfather to Happy Hollow.

With Sam's coming, the problem of our stony fields was solved. Sam looked at them, and grinned; he listened to my talk about what I wanted to do with them, and grinned; and then he went to work, grinning. While he worked, he, too, did some talking. I liked the temper of his talk. He wasn't figuring on lazy makeshifts; he wasn't arguing that all this ex-

tra labor would cost more than the land was worth; he wasn't talking of the shiftless expedients of farming from year to year. He talked of next year, and the year after next, and the long future. He saw exactly what I was trying to get at. I think he was honestly pleased at having a job that gave him opportunity according to his strength. He flew at the stone-moving as if he'd found at last the very sort of task he'd been looking for all his life.

Before he came, we had been putting stone into rough walls along the creek bottoms, planning to save the soil that would be washed down from the fields. My theory of it was all right, though I'd had nothing in the way of practice for a guide. Some of my results made Sam's grin broaden into a laugh. He attacked one of my walls and began to tear it out, though it had a good fifty wagonloads of stone in it.

"We'll move this down to the edge of the creek, instead of putting it here at the foot of the bank," he said. "If we leave it here, all that overflowed creek bottom is waste. Next winter I can clear the brush off the bottom and move the stone off the bank; and then if I

keep turning the edge of the bank down when I plow, pretty soon we'll have it smoothed off. In a few years you'll have three extra acres of the best land on the farm on that bottom, instead of a piece of swamp."

We have those three extra acres planted to corn this year. Last year we made a bumper crop of millet on them. They're rich as cream—they are the cream skimmed off the higher lands by the beating rains. The added value of those three acres and of the crops we've taken from them has just about repaid the cost of all the rock-hauling Sam has done in the five years of his service.

We planned things in that first winter that must take another five years to accomplish. If we ever get to a point where there's no new conquest to be undertaken, I think Sam will quit me. There lies his genius. His grin would fade forever and he'd settle into confirmed melancholy if he had to work on the place after it's all smoothed out.

When the early spring came, I bought plows to match my man's disposition; and for the first time since the Year One these fields had a real breaking. The tenant farmers had been only fooling with plowing, drawing trifling



little furrows that didn't go four inches deep at the best. That was the rule hereabouts; but it was all wrong. It did no more than loosen a thin sheet of soil over a packed "plow pan" of clay, leaving it as if by deliberate design to be washed and guttered by the summer rains. If it didn't happen to wash away, it was sure to dry out entirely between rains, for no water could enter the compacted subsoil. With our big plows and strong mules we tore into the tough "pan," ripping it up, mixing it with the surface soil. It was a rough looking job when it was finished; it didn't promise much for the year's cropping. With the stiff clay, more stone came up; in spots, after the first rain, the fields appeared just about as stone-littered as ever. There was another winter's job of hauling ahead of us. We didn't care about that, though; we had given the land its first touch of real high life. I meant to be satisfied if we harvested anything at all that year.

While our plowing was going on, some of the neighbors got into the way of dropping their own work to look on at ours. They had thought us crazy before; now they were sure of it. If our building had put a crimp in the rules, our farming burst them wide asunder.

In all good faith, with the very best of neighborly intentions, they cautioned us that we were not only inviting disaster but making it certain. It did no good to retort that slow starvation by the accepted neighborhood methods of farming smacked strongly of disaster. It's a thankless task to try to talk any man out of devotion to ancient usages when you have no proofs to show on the side of your innovations. We had nothing to show as yet more convincing than a statement of what our work had cost. There was nothing for us to do but persist. We weren't sure enough of that year's harvest to venture any daring prophecies. It's disconcerting to make prophecies which don't fulfill themselves; it's better to say nothing and saw wood.

If our work in the fields was to be a waiting game, there seemed to be no good reason why we should not get quicker results with our kitchen garden. As I have told you, we meant to make the garden count for all that was possible in supplying our table from the first, so that needless outlays might be cut off.

Special care was given to the preparation of the garden acre near the house. Stone was cleared away early in the fall, and the land



GOOD FOR GENERATIONS TO COME





was broken and harrowed thoroughly, again and again. Around the old pole stable our tenant had used lay a waste of old manure, the accumulation of years. We moved this down and spread it over our patch, turning it under. In late winter it got another breaking, and still another before the first planting. We had a strong, deep seedbed, as well prepared as one season's handling could make it.

We began our gardening early and kept at it through the summer. We were on familiar ground there. For years before we came to the farm we had done successful gardening for our own needs. We were just as successful on the farm. There was nothing unique in our methods or our results; but we were doing something that none of our neighbors was attempting. The gardens around us, on the farms that had any at all, held nothing more than a few poor potatoes and maybe a weed-grown patch of turnips. Most of these folks got their "greens" from the fields and waste places—"poke" sprouts, sour dock, lambs-quarters and dandelions. That's not bad eating, if you want to know it; but to depend upon that supply isn't exactly thrifty farming. Our garden gave us a great variety, with the choic-

est of everything. We weren't trying to do market gardening; we were aiming only at supplying our own needs. We've stuck to that, and we shall keep it up. It pays. No equal acreage on the farm pays nearly so well, judged by its effect upon our household economy.

We set out asparagus beds that spring. We planted a vineyard of six dozen vines and a dozen varieties that were selected to give us choice grapes fresh for our table over the longest possible season, from early summer to late fall. We planted an orchard on the same plan—a hundred and fifty trees of plum, peach, apple, apricot, cherry and pear—thirty or forty varieties. None of that was done for commercial purposes; it was all planned for the home. In time, of course, we would have a surplus to be sold; but that would be incidental. Our own dining-room and pantry and storeroom made the center of this scheme.

The townsman's habit of taking care of his trees and his garden patch clung to us. On our acre of orchard at Omaha I had nursed my trees like so many babies, feeding, trimming, cultivating, keeping every one like a show-piece. The trees on the farm were handled in



the same way. The grapevines were formed on an intensive renewal system. Part of this work was done for the sake of keeping up appearances around the house, and part for the better returns we were sure to get by and by in fruiting. Nothing need be said in defense of that extra care. I speak of it only because it was a radical departure from the way such things had been done on neighboring farms. Farmers are proverbially careless of their orchards everywhere. That's a part of the short-sighted habit of slighting everything that does not promise quick returns. Here in the hills if a farmer set out a few trees for home fruit they would be left to shift for themselves afterward—he would forget all about them for three or four or five years, until it was time for them to come into bearing. There's been a mintful of money lost on the farms by that thriftless trick. A follow-up system is just as necessary in bringing a farm to the profit-making point as in any other business. Lacking such a system, a farm springs a hundred leaks. The hardest work I've had to do with my farm helpers has been in persuading them of the wisdom of keeping things up. With neglected holes at the bottom, there's just no

chance at all for an overflow of abundance at the top. If those wastes would be stopped, you'd hear far less sorrowful complaining that farming doesn't afford a decent living.

Our poultry flock took a jump that spring from the townsman's couple of dozen to the farmer's couple of hundred. I shall have more to say about the hen proposition after a while. Also we were laying the foundation for high-grade dairy and pig herds.

We had made one of our mistakes with our cows. In our first summer, seeing acres and acres of luxuriant wild grass going to waste on the uncleared lands among the rocks and the scrub growths, I had bought a dozen cows and a cream separator. The cows were good animals; each of them passed a satisfactory test at our university station. The station was taking cream from farmers at a very satisfactory price for butterfat. There was potential profit in our herd; indeed, for several months they gave a net profit of twenty-five to thirty dollars a month over everything, besides furnishing our table abundantly with milk and cream and butter and an unlimited quantity of skim milk for the young pigs.

Before the end of the summer, though, we

ran against a snag. Our wild pasture had been overstocked. The native grasses of the Ozark country are not to be depended upon throughout a season; they are sensitive to occasional drought, and they are not of a high type at best. In the late summer we were up against the necessity of buying feed or cutting down the herd. We cut it down, keeping the best animals as a basis for later rebuilding. From the university stables I had bought a fine blooded Jersey bull calf—he's "Billy Fortune" in the herd books. We kept him, of course. He's a lordly fellow now, with a fine string of youngsters to his credit on our own farm and over the neighborhood. In the end we were far better off for that trimming back. The mistake had entailed no loss. Indeed, we were left with a snug little balance on the other side. Just the same, we had misjudged conditions. We had discovered that dairying on any considerable scale must be a part of the waiting game. That was a part of the price we had paid for taking a run-down instead of a "going" farm. We should have to let our herds grow slowly, watching carefully, letting their growth keep pace with the increasing ability of the farm to feed them. We entered



our second summer with only half as many cows as we had bought to start with. That may look like a setback; but it didn't strike us so after we had thought it over. We had gained some invaluable experience, and we had made a little money at the same time. That wasn't so bad.

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## V

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As our first summer of real farming slipped by, we had plenty of proofs that ours was not bonanza farming. If you were to judge our enterprise for the first two or three years by the figures on our books representing income in dollars and cents, you would be bound to call it a conspicuous failure. A skilled bookkeeper with his conventional notions could have argued us inevitably into the poorhouse, without any trouble at all. He could have proved that, the way we were going, with our limited resources, we couldn't possibly escape catastrophe.

I used to stand rather in awe of bookkeepers and their nice, methodical, exact work; but since we've been at Happy Hollow I've rejoiced a thousand times that we hadn't acquired the bookkeeper's habits of mind. A retired bookkeeper taking a farm like Happy Hollow and carrying his professional habits with him must be a desperately unhappy man.

Who was the man that said figures can't lie? They're the most shameless of liars. Lots of other folks have found that out. You can prove any proposition you are bent on proving, if you'll only devise a complicated hard-and-fast system of accounting.

Here's one point the bookkeepers always overlook in judging a venture like ours: The operation of a farm home is radically different from the mere cropping of a tract of land for direct profit. If we had bought Happy Hollow as an investment pure and simple, intending to run it purely and simply as a business that must pay profits in dollars and cents realized from the sale of products, then the bookkeeper's arguments would be sensible enough and worth heeding. The non-resident farm owner who is cultivating his land by the tenant system or with hired labor, growing the staples for market, is in that case. He may consider his land as he would consider a bond or a bunch of bank stock. At the year's end his bookkeeper can show him to a nicety whether he has had a satisfactory return upon his investment. Whether it will pay to keep on at the business is a question to be settled by plain, cold business judgment.



That's all right. But when you begin to consider the farm home, with the farmer and his family living on the land, then you bring in a hundred and one new and elusive factors that simply defy any inflexible system of business reckoning. I'm not talking about purely sentimental factors, but of those things that will appeal to the most intensely practical of men who hasn't a fiber of sentiment in his make-up.

During our first summer of actual farm work, we couldn't even guess how long it would take us to get the place built up to the point of yielding satisfactory field crops; but in the meantime we were continually taking stock of conditions, making curious appraisal of our life.

Naturally enough, we made our first comparisons with the life we had known before we took to farming. Leaving out enthusiasms and keeping strictly to those items which may be written with the dollar mark, this is the way the matter stood in our understanding:

The money we were spending on the land in clearing, stone hauling, wall building and in such-like ways, and in the first deep, thorough breaking of our cultivated fields, was money invested; the increase in value that was surely

following these improvements gave a greater profit than we could possibly have secured on any other sound investment. Every dollar we put in was doubling itself. We had nothing to worry about on that score. Our one care was to plan this field work so as to have it intelligent, and so as to keep within the sum we felt free to use in that way. I've touched upon this point before; I refer to it again because of its bearing upon our summing up of things at this time. Our field work in the first year or two wasn't chargeable to expense, as on a "going" farm. The crops we got in those years would suffice to feed our work team at least; so we would "break even" there. I think we could have induced even the fussiest of bookkeepers to see the matter so.

Our table living was costing us nothing at all, even at that stage. That's literally true. In town our outlay for groceries and meat had been about \$600 a year, and we were getting no more than any townsman gets for his money—stuff that at its best was only fair-to-middling. At the end of our first year of work, when Laura balanced her housekeeping accounts, she dared me to guess what we had spent in that year for table supplies. It

amounted to only a few cents over \$100. That had gone for coffee and sugar and flour and the few things we couldn't grow for ourselves. Surplus sold from garden and dairy and poultry yards, now a little and then a little, had more than offset the sum spent for these staples. The difference paid the cost of our gardening. Poultry and cows were paying for their "keep" in the increase of flocks and herd and in the value of manure that went out, carefully husbanded, to our fields and orchard and garden. The supplies that went upon our table from all these sources stood as profit earned and paid. I'm not talking figuratively when I say that our farm was already saving us \$600 a year as compared with the cost of living as we'd known it in town. We'll get to a closer analysis of some of these figures by and by; I'm just lumping them now.

To put it another way, we had to use in that year only \$100 in money in the business of feeding the family, to effect exchanges that couldn't conveniently be made directly. That narrow margin deceived some of our friends who weren't used to our way of doing things. I had done some talking in the earlier months. One of the bankers of Fayetteville, with whom



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of our work, joked me about the result of the year's work.

"It hasn't come out very well, has it?" he asked.

"The best ever!" I said. "I'm perfectly satisfied." He thought I was doing some joking in my turn.

"You didn't sell anything this fall off the farm," he said. You see, he'd grown accustomed to the practice of the farmers of selling a crop of grain at harvest and using the proceeds to pay store bills that were run up during the year.

"No," I tried to explain, "we're not selling anything, except some surplus butter and eggs once in a while. What the farm produces we're eating ourselves."

He laughed at that, as a banker may laugh at a customer's not-too-humorous jest. "Hominy and hay, eh?" he returned. "How do your folks like it?"

"We never lived so well in our lives before," I said. I went into detail a little then, trying to make our theory plain. "If we're not selling much," I contended, "you'll notice we're not buying much either. We're making our farm do for us what the grocer and the commission

men and the traders do for most of these farmers, and so we're saving the profits and rake-offs on a lot of exchanges back and forth, don't you see?"

He saw but dimly. "Oh!" he said. "You're not intending to do commercial farming, then?" Fixed habit of mind is hard to break. I've talked with other men, farmers included, who held the same opinion of our enterprise. One business man in town solemnly argued that we couldn't possibly be making a success, for the reason that the farm wasn't showing any "turn-over." To his way of thinking, the couple of hundred dollars' worth of stuff we'd sold represented all the business we had done for the year. Even if that was all profit, he contended, it was a starvation income.

"Starvation be jiggered!" I said. "We're living on the fat of the land. Here's the point: Our 'turn-overs' are being made inside our own farm fence lines, instead of in town. We're turning our grain and hay and forage into milk and eggs and butter and meat, instead of selling them and buying milk and eggs and butter and meat. You simply can't beat our system. It would have to come to the same thing in the end, wouldn't it—just feeding the family?"

And this way we keep all the profits for ourselves."

He shook his head over it. He's still shaking his head over it. With all his business training and sagacity—and he's a successful business man—he couldn't make out that we were doing anything better than silly trifling. The small amount of money we had changed from hand to hand, which to our understanding was the greatest strength of our proposition at that stage, to his understanding stood for a vital weakness, a weakness that must bring us to disaster pretty soon.

"You aren't making trade!" That's the fault folks found with our scheme. Nevertheless, our system was our salvation in our first years. We must have "bumped the bumps" if we had taken the way our friends urged upon us. That's the simple truth.

When I say that our table living cost us nothing, to be sure I haven't set a price upon the time we spent on the garden and the chickens and the rest. I don't see how that can be done, in making a comparison with our town conditions. We spent no more time here in the new ways than we had spent in town at our housekeeping and at keeping things up around





EVERYTHING FOR THE TABLE AT BARE COST OF PRODUCTION



our home. We had changed the uses we were making of our hours, that was all; we had just about as much leisure as ever. Besides, the abundance of everything, and all of first quality, was to be considered.

Then there was the matter of rent. I don't quite know how to get at that, so as to satisfy everybody. A house like our farmhouse couldn't have been hired in town—one affording such ample room, I mean—for less than \$100 a month. We had never paid any such rent; but there's the fact. We were living as we had always wanted to live, though we hadn't been able to afford it. If I credit Happy Hollow Farm with rent at \$100 a month, that would repay the whole cost of the house in sixteen or seventeen months—which doesn't seem exactly reasonable, does it? I'll tell you what I'll do with you: I'll call it \$50 a month and let it go at that. So there's another \$600 a year to the good.

Then there's the cost of fuel. To heat our house in town used to set us back \$150 to \$200 every winter, the cost varying according to weather conditions and fluctuations in the price of coal. At Happy Hollow we've burned ten cords of wood a year in heating and cooking.



It has cost us about eighty-five cents a cord to cut this wood and bring it down to the house from the hill—\$8.50 a year. In getting out this supply we're cleaning up the woodlot, taking out the dead-and-down, the broken and the too-old trees, leaving the young and thrifty timber to grow. That is increasing the value of our woods many times more than the work is costing; but let that go. Say we're saving \$150 a year on fuel. That makes a total saving on the three principal cost-of-living items of \$1,350 a year. Mind you, we were living better than we had ever been able to live on that amount of outlay.

And then there's the matter of health. We had always been tolerably sane livers, and none of the family had any leaning toward invalidism; but in town I was always paying doctors for something or other. I don't remember what those bills amounted to in the course of a year, but they came in as regularly as the grocery bills. As nearly as I can figure it, \$100 a year would be about right. That was cut off short when we came to the farm. What they say about fresh air, fresh food, vigorous exercise and sound sleep must be true. For two solid years there wasn't a doctor on the place,

except once when my boy was bucked off a horse and had his collar bone broken. The gain in health can't be measured; but the saving can. We'll leave that out of the reckoning, though; you may think I'm bearing down too strong on this part of the matter, trying to make out a case.

Seriously, can you find any flaw in that way of looking at things? I can't. Maybe it wouldn't altogether suit our friend the book-keeper; he might want to apportion some of the items differently, so as to make them gee with his own theories of accounting; but he couldn't escape the conclusion that even at the beginning we were on a secure footing.

The charges to be made against the enterprise—interest on investment, taxes, insurance and depreciation of machinery and equipment—amounted to \$400. In that year we paid \$500 for labor on the land. Those two items were counterbalanced by increased value. So it boils down to this: Life at Happy Hollow was saving us at least \$100 a month the year round as compared with life in town. I couldn't get away from that if I wanted to. And we were living in a dream come true! Don't overlook that.

Our field crops in that first year didn't turn out so badly. Our college friend had said that good farming ought to let us get seventy-five bushels of corn to the acre on our land, once the farm had been brought up to normal. Of course we hadn't expected to do so well as that in the first season. Our harvest gave us twenty-six bushels to the acre. As that was more than twice as much as our tenant farmer had been getting, we managed to feel pretty well satisfied. The average corn crop in all the states over a ten-year period was just twenty-six bushels to the acre. We had nothing to complain about. We had saved a pretty fair crop of hay—cowpeas, millet, sorghum and oats cut "in the milk"; and there was a lot of corn fodder. Our new clearings had brought into use several acres of wild grass pasture. That wasn't nearly so good as the pastures we could make by and by; but it had carried our few cows over seven or eight months with only a little extra feeding.

When cold weather came on, we put up our next year's supply of sugar-cured hams and bacon. That was new work, but we did every lick of it ourselves, according to directions given us at the university experiment station.



Five pigs of two hundred and fifty pounds weight were put through their paces; twenty plump hams and shoulders and twenty strips of brown sweet bacon hung in our smokehouse, in the smudge of green hickory chips. Don't you like that smell? I used to go out in the chill of the early mornings and hang around the smokehouse for a while and sniff, to get up an appetite for breakfast. There were big cans of sweet lard in the storeroom, too. For a while, at butchering time, we lived, let me tell you! Rich spare-ribs—no butcher shop ribs, with a thin shred of meat discovered now and then between the bones, if you're lucky; but ribs with real meat on them, coming to the table crisped and odorous, so that for all one's town-learned manners he couldn't to save his life keep from oiling his face from ear to ear. And home-made sausage, seasoned with sweet herbs gathered fresh from the garden and dried between clean cloths! Honestly, I'm sorry for the man who hasn't experienced real farm sausage. Plebeian? Is that what you think of it? Indeed and it's not! I wish you might sit down just once to a Happy Hollow breakfast in January, when a hot platter comes to the table filled

with thin sausage cakes, cooked to the perfection of a deep brown turn, and a dish of golden corn-cakes to dip the brown gravy over. Plebeian? Fudge! Why, the great gods in their most divine longings couldn't beat it. There ought to be a poetry of sausage; plain prose has such pesky limitations.

Not a little of the sub-conscious satisfaction of eating such food lies in your having been intimately acquainted with the pig that produced it. Butcher shop eating, the best you can make of it, is a sort of catch-as-catch-can business. It's a lot better if you have it in the back of your head that your pig was brought up as a gentleman—a very Chesterfield of the pig family, fed on clean pastures and skim milk and sweet grain. There's a Fifth Avenue as well as a slumdom in pig life. If you're running the pig nursery yourself, you can be comfortably sure that you're not eating a Billy the Dip. You'd rather like that, wouldn't you?

We weren't living on pig alone. There were the chickens, too. We had fancied we knew something about chicken-eating before we came to Happy Hollow. We had eaten chicken clear across the continent, from Boston to San

Francisco, and from Canada to the Gulf; chicken creole, and chicken Maryland style, and chicken in casserole, and chicken in pot and pan and kettle; chicken fried, and roasted, and broiled, and stewed, and boiled; chicken soup, and chicken with dumplings, and chicken with rice, and chicken with chili; chicken in every style in the books, from just plain chicken on up to chicken fixed so fussy it's own mother wouldn't mourn for it. Yes, sir, we thought we knew all about chicken-eating.

But we didn't. The fact of it is that there's only one real way to fix up a chicken for eating, and we hadn't known a blessed thing about it till we had an inspiration and did it for ourselves.

It's a particular job. If you're a quick-lunch fiend, or one of those dull fellows who insist upon having dinner on the table at twelve sharp and then fight your way through with it with both hands furiously, so you can get the empty dishes stacked up and go back to your work in a hurry, you won't understand what I'm talking about. There are others who will know. John Ridd would sympathize. So would old Sam Weller. I'd give a pretty penny for the privilege of cooking a chicken my



way for one of the *Noctes* of Christopher North and the Ettrick Shepherd and Timothy Tickler. I sure would!

You know how the recipes start off in the books: "Take a chicken." But that won't do. You know what you're liable to get when you just "take a chicken"—one of those scrawny, blue-skinned caricatures that would make a tramp feel he'd been cheated if he stole it. The chicken that's consecrated to this Happy Hollow cookery must be picked out with as much care as you'd use in picking the horse you expected to bet on at a Derby. We pick 'em out from the flock in the yards when they're half grown; and when they're selected they go into training. It's not training down, but training up. For the rest of their lives they live in chicken paradise, fed on clean grain and milk and green clover, so that they grow lustily. A spring Orpington with that sort of feeding will be an eight-pounder or better at Holiday time, a perfect picture of what a chicken ought to be—plump as a toy balloon, with the plumpness in tender meat, and only a little loose fat distributed around here and there under his yellow skin. When he's dressed

—I mean when he's stripped for action, he'll look mightily puffed up and proud.

This chicken doesn't come into the house by the back way and stay in the kitchen till dinner's ready. He comes right on into the big living-room and lies on the table in a deep pan, so that folks may walk around him and admire him and be getting acquainted with his points. An hour or so before the real cooking starts I've built up one of those roaring fires of hickory and oak in the great fireplace, piling it high, coaxing the brick lining to glow red with ardent heat. When it can't get any hotter, then the chicken is hung from the stone mantel, head down, by a heavy string with a short wire leader, as close to the blaze as possible without touching it. A dripping pan, holding pepper and salt, lies on the hearth beneath him. Standing at one side, with a big spoon tied at the end of a long stick, I start him to turning slowly, very slowly. I have to shield my face against the heat; but that's all right. Nothing less in the way of a fire will do.

It's only a minute or two till the drip starts, and in five minutes the yellow skin begins to crisp and blacken. If you aren't used to anything but those lean and thready chickens of

the markets, you'd think this one must take fire and burn up. He won't, though, not with all that wealth of juice in him. I'm trying to sear the skin over thoroughly, so the juice will stay in. As the fat trickles down into the pan, I keep dipping it up over him, to hurry the browning.

Now watch him. He's turning and turning. The first thing you know you'll see oily yellow bubbles swelling under the skin on breast and back and thigh. They swell and swell till they're big as eggs; and then they burst and jets of oily steam shoot out with a sound like a penny whistle. Just sniff that steam, now! The room will be full of that odor before we're through; you'll have to stand it for an hour.

The fire may sink a bit, now that the skin is crusted. All we have to do now is to turn and turn, and keep dipping up the drippings, and wait. It's no trouble to tell when he's done; the tender meat begins to pull away from the leg-bones, and his whole body takes on a sort of ripe, finished look, and there's an unmistakable finished smell in the sputtering steam. The best sign, though, is that you simply can't wait any longer.



Now, then, you take a shaving of that white meat and a little slice off the thigh, piping hot, and a brown roll with sweet butter and apple jelly, and tell me if that isn't real chicken eating! Oh, man, dear! Some of these times I'm going to write a cook-book, and there won't be another thing in it but young chicken roasted before a roaring open fire.

We really lived at Happy Hollow in that second winter. For my own part, I was finding sheer delight in every least scrap of the experience. It seemed to me that this life was as clear of the rubbish of living as any on earth could be. That suited me, down to the ground. I had never been strong for the frills and fixings. Simplicity was the thing—not the affected austerity of the ascetic who tortures himself into that state of mind, but the sort of plain living that lets a man keep his time for the things he thinks essential—for real work or real leisure. We had kept our town life with our friends down to that basis as well as we could; but you know how the odds and ends of trifling “obligations” will pile up on you. We had always disliked wasting time on empty formalities that did nobody any good, but we hadn't been strong-minded enough to

keep free of them altogether. We could have that freedom on the farm. People who would travel to Happy Hollow over that crazy country road would do it because they really wanted to see us; and we would think twice before we'd go bumping into town on a useless errand. That's the way the matter sifted itself out in my head.

I wasn't so sure of Laura's feeling, for we had never thrashed it out together in plain words. We had had a year and a half on the farm before we got to that point. Then one morning the chance came.

It was a gorgeous morning in December; the sort of winter morning that comes to us here in the Ozarks often and often, crisp and tonic but without a trace of the raw cold of the North. Sunrise acted itself out for us in crimson and gold finery as we stood together at our kitchen door, looking off across the hills. A broad, curling ribbon of white fog lay over the river, shrouding the valley, with great tree-tops stabbing through here and there. The sun touched the fog warmly; it lifted and drifted softly up the long hill-slopes to the southward, hung for a little time from the peaks in rose-tinted plumes, then soared into

the high air. Far as we could see the valley opened out and out in the crystal-clear light, brimming with peace and beauty.

"Aren't those hills wonderful!" Laura said by and by. "They're never done with surprising me. I think this is the most beautiful spot in the world."

"Is it good enough to pay you for being a farmer's wife?" I asked.

Laura didn't accept the challenge to an argument. Her eyes were fixed on the distances. "There isn't a thing there," she said, "that doesn't seem worth while."

That was the very thing! I didn't press my foolish question.



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## VI

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WE had a diversion in our second winter at Happy Hollow. In November one of the members of the staff of the *Saturday Evening Post* came out to visit us, on a hunt for "copy." I had done some work for the *Post* in the days before we took to farming, and the visit was a renewal of old acquaintance. We fooled around the farm and through the woods and over the hills for a few days, talking; we had a brace of young Orpingtons roasted before the big fire; we argued about a number of things. The sum of it was that I undertook to write a little story of our farm and of the fun we'd had in our adventure.

The story was printed in January of 1910. It was the story of a transplanted townsman who had found for himself some of the world-old happiness of home-making.

The day that story appeared, letters began coming to us. Within a week they were coming by fifties in every mail; in another week

they were coming by the hundred. They arrived from every nook and corner of the world; from Cape Town, and Copenhagen; from the Argentine Republic and from Northern Manchuria; from New Zealand and Yucatan; from Egypt and from the Arctic Circle. Within the next three months, when we quit keeping count, we had more than 3,500 of those letters stacked up. Still they came. They're still coming, for that matter, now and then.

Those thousands of letters were strung upon a single thread of living interest: Was our story fact or fiction? Was it actually possible for a pair of average mortals in this mortal life, without a special dispensation of Providence, to find what we had found, to do what we had done? Would there be a fighting chance that the writers might do for themselves such a thing, having a little money and plenty of courage and strong desire? They were wonderfully human, those letters; wonderfully intimate; rich in revelation of feeling. There wasn't a formal note in the lot; some of them covered close-written pages and pages. It has been a lasting regret that we couldn't answer them all as we wanted to. We tried, spending

long hours at it every day; but we couldn't keep up.

People began coming to see us, too; a few at first, and then more and more. When spring opened, on some days we'd have a score of folks on the place, walking around, poking into things and asking questions. Like the letters, they came from everywhere—from every state in the Union, from Mexico and Canada, and even from across the big water. One man came straight from Manila to Fayetteville. They weren't merely curious; they were vividly interested, for in the making of this farm home they found something of their own ideals wrought into tangible form.

During that spring and summer and fall we had a couple of thousand visitors. Day after day we didn't try to do anything but meet them and talk with them. It was very interesting, very illuminating. We enjoyed every minute of it. It did us good in many ways. The concrete good of it was that it brought into the country around Fayetteville scores of men and women who had the daring to give their desires a practical try-out. In the four years that have passed, two or three hundred newcomers have settled hereabouts. They have made a great



change in the face of the land and in all living conditions.

Some of these people were practical farmers; most of them, and those who interested us most, were townsfolk. There's no need to say much about the farmers. They have succeeded according to their deserts, just as they would have succeeded anywhere. Their question was simply a question of change of location. With the townsmen it was different. They are worth considering a bit here, I think. There are few spots on the map where within so short a time so many people have actually tried this back-to-the-land proposition under conditions like ours. There has been a sort of community spirit among us; we have been able to keep track of one another and to judge of the reasons for success or failure.

There have been some real successes, and some flat failures. Success hasn't seemed to depend essentially upon the amount of money a man might bring with him in his hands, nor upon his age, nor upon his earlier training, nor upon any early familiarity with the theory or practice of good farming. Some have failed though they had plenty of money to start with; some have made it go though they had to hus-

band their two-bit pieces carefully. Some have failed who could talk book-farming glibly; some have succeeded who at the beginning couldn't tell the difference between a "middle buster" and a corn planter. Some have failed who were at the height of youthful vigor; some have succeeded who were gray and time-seamed. At first glance there doesn't seem to be any rule for it; but when you think over it, it has come out quite logically. Really there isn't any mystery.

At the very bottom of success in every one of these cases has been that gift of mind that's called initiative. In spite of the load of abuse it's had to carry lately, that word still has life and meaning in it. In this case it means ability to slough old habits of thinking and to do fresh, vigorous thinking to fit new conditions of life and work. A preacher or a dentist or a lawyer who turns farmer must quit thinking in terms of theology or dentistry or law and begin thinking in terms of the soil. He must be able to adapt himself, not only bodily but mentally. If he can do that, he's started on the right road; if he can't, he's running up a blind alley. This isn't the place for giving examples and illustrations. You'll just have to

take my word for it that I'm stating the fact fairly as we've seen it here. Many of these people had been successful home-makers on their town lots, with gardens and chickens and flowers; but they couldn't change their thinking from the square yard to the acre. Acres overwhelmed them.

We've had another point well illustrated here; a point that ought to be obvious enough, though it's too often ignored. The man who said that poets are born, not made, didn't exclude the other callings from his rule. The rule is just as good for farmers as for poets. That is to say, the man who succeeds at farming must have the flair for it. It isn't enough to be convinced that farming may be made a good, paying business; one must be a thorough convert to the soil. We've known men hereabouts who came to their new farms with most impeccable schemes of business management, but who fell down disastrously because, when it came to the critical point, they were hopeless aliens to the land. I don't know any better way of saying it than to use a rather vague phrase: The successful farmer must love the soil, feeling himself akin to it. Love of the good earth makes a far better beginning than



an exact knowledge of soil chemistry. One may learn his chemistry afterward out of the text-books; but love isn't to be mastered so. It's all well enough to pooh-pooh sentiment, to say that sentiment has no place in business, and all that; but that's poor talk. I've never known a man who had made a conspicuous success at farming or anything else without a sentimental attachment for his job. Sentiment's the thing! Honest to goodness, I'd as soon try to live with a wife I didn't love as to work with an acre I didn't care for. With that feeling left out, farming is no more than an expedient—just a hard way of making a living. The hardships and discouragements take on vast proportions. That's been worked out before our eyes here, many and many a time.

We've seen this, too: There comes a time in the farming experience of every townsman when novelty wears off and some of the rough facts begin to loom large. Laura says it's just like the critical "second summer" in the life of a baby. The enterprise is past its first infancy; it's cutting its teeth and learning to walk; it's having a lot of knocks and bumps and pains. In that period it needs some careful nursing if it's to be pulled through—and

that's the very time when lots of folks make up their minds that they've tackled too big an undertaking. Success or failure is likely to be settled right there. You can see how that may be. Suppose you were the man in the case. Suppose you had been spending a long string of hot summer days in a new field, toiling at unfamiliar work, coming in at night dead weary and stained with earth and sweat and with rows and bunches of blisters scattered around over you. Suppose you weren't wise enough to judge whether your year's crop would amount to anything, for all this labor. Suppose you sat out on the porch after supper, brooding over the lonesomeness. Suppose you'd forgotten to buy smoking tobacco the last time you were in town. And suppose—just suppose—that your wife had said something just the least bit fretful or peevish about something that had gone wrong with her work. It's just possible that you'd conjure up a picture of your old familiar town streets at night, with the bright lights, and the picture shows, and the tobacco shops on every other corner, and all the stir and bustle and gayety you used to know so well. If that keeps up, and if something happens that puts a little crimp of

discouragement in you at the wrong moment, it's supposable that you may come to a sudden snap judgment and chuck the whole thing and turn your face "back home." We've seen them do that. We've seen many a case where success might very well have come if the lightly balanced scales of decision had only tipped the other way in the critical hour.

I'm not writing mere abstract arguments now; I'm giving the sum of scores of actual experiences that have been lived out around us. It comes to this: Success hangs upon state of mind more than upon any externals. In the last four years we have been much disturbed by the spectacle of eager, hopeful men and women surrendering to discouragement and failure. But we have seen others achieve happy success. If we tried to deduce from these cases a rule that would prescribe how old a man ought to be, or how much money he ought to have, or what he ought to do upon his land to make the game win for him, we'd have to give it up. But if you want a rule, if you must have a rule of some sort that will guide the back-to-the-lander, here's one:

Get hold of your farm and then make violent love to it and keep it up.



There's a rule that will work. None other will that we know anything about.

Mark: Though you're likely to take that for a foolish theory, it isn't any such thing. It isn't a theory at all; it's nothing but a plain summing up of what we've seen going on around us in the last four years. I can't state that too emphatically.

Anyway, we got some fine new neighbors that year, and many of them have stuck. They're still coming in; and slowly, year by year, we're changing the face of the land. Happy Hollow is no longer a hidden nook in a shaggy wilderness. The country is beginning to look like something. The work doesn't go swiftly. There have been no lightning-flashes of accomplishment. A bit at a time we're building up a fine, strong, happy community.

There's a wide lawn spreading around our farmhouse—about three acres in smooth sward and three or four more in park formed by young trees that were saved from the first clearing—oak, elm, hackberry, hickory, persimmon, wild cherry, black haw, walnut, locust. Specimens were left of every native tree we found in our jungle; and here and there stands a close group of saplings bound together in

their tops by matted wild grape vines, making little summer nooks. These house grounds have given us no end of delight in the making. We're working on them still, a little at a time. The real work began in that spring of 1910, after the first rough clearing was done.

For many years this spot had been a dumping ground for all the refuse of the farm. Stone heaps were everywhere; and between were rusting and rotting piles of old cans and broken tools and all manner of junk. We had to clear all that away. There were tough old stumps to come out, too, and a litter of loose stone to be picked up. After that, with plow and scraper and harrow, we smoothed the land down, stopping between whiles to grub out a mess of roots or buck-brush or to pry up a huge boulder. We've moved a train load of rubbish from this corner. It was back-breaking work—chopping, tugging, lifting, conquering a square yard at a time, building the yards into square rods painfully. We worked without sympathy from our native neighbors. By that time most of them had given us up as hopeless imbeciles who were "wastin' money somethin' turrible." To do anything on a farm to any

end but the most obvious utility wasn't justified to their understanding.

There was Jake. Jake lived on a rocky little patch on the hillside back of Happy Hollow—there were three generations of a multitudinous family in a squalid two-room shack set on stilts, with a couple of pigs sheltered beneath the floor. Jake was of the middle generation. Though he had lived here all his life, almost under the shadow of the walls of the university, neither he nor any of his folks could read a word; nor could any one of them, by any toilsome "figgerin'," discover how many quarters and dimes and nickels went to make up a dollar. When he was paid for a day's work, he liked to have his money given him in one big, round coin. He knew what that was.

Jake used to work for us at odd times, according to the philosophy of the neighborhood; that is, he didn't want a steady job, but he learned to look upon our farm as a place where he might come for an occasional day's work in emergency, when his family would be "plumb out of meal." Whenever we saw him come moseying down the trail from his cabin we could tell at a distance infallibly whether he was coming as a laborer or to make us a



friendly visit. So long as we knew him he wore only one suit of clothes. It must have been a cast-off when he moved into it; for to say that it bagged about his lean frame is to make a poverty-stricken use of words. There was extra room enough in his breeches for a couple of his children. In the course of the years that suit of his had become a fearful and wonderful thing in its tailoring—patches upon patches; a great, rough square of gunny-sacking set upon the original cloth, and a triangle of faded blue denim on the bagging, and a ragged oval of old plaid shawl on the denim. Joseph's coat wasn't in it with Jake's pants. Every patch in the lot flapped picturesquely loose at one side or the other. The state of those flaps betrayed his state of mind beyond mistaking. If he came for work, their edges would flutter free; but when he dressed for Sunday or in his favorite rôle of gentleman of leisure the flaps would be tucked in carefully. That sign never failed. Just so surely as we saw him come into the offing looking like a yacht with all its bunting flying, we knew the formula for what was coming:

“Ha-owd’y! You-uns all up?” Which was a kindly inquiry as to the state of our health.

“Ha-owd’y, Jake! Yes, we-uns are all up. You-uns all up?”

“Yes, we-uns all up.” And then, after a decently dignified interval: “I reckon I better be cuttin’ you-all a little jag o’ wood this mawnin’. We-all is needin’ coffee.”

Jake could never sense the meaning of our work for beauty’s sake around the house. He worked with us some times, doing what he was told in the rough preparation; but he never knew just what we were driving at. At the last, when the scraping and rolling were finished and we began seeding our first acre with Dutch clover and bluegrass, he stood by in complete bewilderment.

“Hit ’pears to me,” he said, “like you-uns has done spent a heap o’ money gittin’ that little patch o’ land fixed for plantin’. What fer a crop is that you-all are puttin’ onto it?”

“We’re planting lawn, Jake,” I tried to explain.

The word went clear past him. “Lawn,” he echoed. “I ’most believe I’ve hearn tell about lawn, some’eres. What kind of a crop is it?”

Even when he saw the finished work, smooth and green and fair, his understanding held aloof. “Hit looks to me like plumb waste,”

he criticized. "You-all's cattle could git a heap o' pickin' off that grass. Ain't you-uns goin' to use it fer nothin' at all?"

Good old Jake! He's dead now. We've wondered what he thinks of the New Jerusalem, with all its flagrant exhibit of glories that the pigs and mules can't eat.

We've kept steadily at work upon our house grounds through these years, grubbing, hacking, trimming, setting hedges and rose gardens, doing most of it with our own hands. We've never found anybody to work at that job comprehendingly.

Our field work, though, went ahead in that year under full steam. Looking over the old fields after the spring plowing, when the effect of the last year's work could be judged, I had my first real thrill of satisfaction as a farmer. Even in a twelvemonth our handling of the soil had told immeasurably. Instead of the tenant's three- or four-inch furrows, that did no more than break the surface into clods, we had turned six-inch furrows last year, and continual timely harrowing and cultivating had put our soil into far better mechanical condition than it had ever known. It wasn't as we wanted it yet, by a long shot; but we had some-



thing to work upon by way of a foundation. The new spring plowing went eight inches deep, turning up a new layer of the subsoil. The harrows, both spike and spring-tooth, followed the plows forthwith, catching the clay at just the right time, working it well into the mass. New stone was brought to light with the deeper breaking. We hauled that off at once, and then flew at the fields with a heavy log drag, pulverizing the surface thoroughly and packing it into a firm bed so that it would hold the last drop of its gathered moisture. The tough old "plow-pan" was gone now; there was nothing to prevent free circulation of moisture. Since that time neither drought nor freshet has bothered us. When the heavy rains come, they sink deep, instead of running madly away down the slopes with our soil, leaving the surface guttered and torn; and if a drought strikes us, there's a deep reservoir to be drawn upon.

On the several smaller patches left us by the tenant—those that were too small to let us use the cultivator to advantage—we planted small grain, oats and rye, to be cut as hay in May or early June, and to be followed at once with a thick sowing of cowpeas. Our first year of

experience had converted me absolutely to the cowpea, though that experience had given me only the merest foretaste of its value. Now, after five years of use, I'm a cowpea radical. I'd let go of any other crop on our list before I'd abandon this. When our friend at the experiment station told us of it, we had made allowance for him as a zealous advocate, maybe a little shy on the judicial temperament; but we know now that he stopped short of the whole truth. It's hard to understand why the South has been so laggard in the use of this great little old plant.

In our first year we had put cowpeas on every one of those smaller fields, broadcasting a bushel or more of seed to the acre, and cutting the vines for hay in August or early September. That cutting gave us a ton and a half to the acre of cured hay equal in feeding value to the best alfalfa; in places, where we had been able to break deeply, the yield went to two and a half tons. When that crop was off, a strong second growth came on from the stubble. This was left upon the ground, and in the fall some of it was pastured and some turned under as green manure.

There was magic in its effect upon the small



OUR FIRST CROP





grains in the next season. Through years of careless use, the soil had been stripped of just about the last pennyweight of its available nitrogen, so that every leaf and blade that tried to grow upon the land looked bloodless—sick-limed o’er, you might say, with the pale cast of thoughtlessness. Our cowpeas had begun the work of restoration, catching free nitrogen out of the air and tucking it deep into the crannies and crevices. Our oats and rye came on in the next spring a thick coat of vivid green, vigorous and hearty, the straw twice as tall as it had stood the year we bought the place, and rich with broad, succulent leaves. Most of that change was to be credited to one good cropping with the cowpea. So, when the grain was cut, cured and hauled to the haymows, the land was broken again immediately, and then we harrowed in a bushel and a half of cowpeas to the acre. On some of the patches the peas stood alone; on one we mixed half a bushel of German millet with each bushel of peas, and on another half a bushel of amber sorghum, to see if the stiff straw and cane would support the vines and aid in the work of curing. We’ve stuck to that system. Sometimes, when the hay supply threatens to be short, we plant the

peas as a main crop, seeding as early in the spring as the ground is thoroughly warmed up. Always we follow small grain with peas, no matter if the grain harvest is late; for, whatever happens, we'll have a rich green crop to turn under. Always we drill peas between the corn-rows at the last cultivation, cutting and feeding the vines with the fodder after harvest, or occasionally "topping" the corn-stalks for a fodder crop and pasturing young cattle on the stubble and pea-vines. The long and short of it is that we plant cowpeas wherever and whenever we have a vacant space on the land. I'm persuaded that, barring only the deep breaking and thorough cultivation, nothing else has served so well to build up our soil and our crop yields.

In that second year our corn, too, showed the effect of the previous year's pea-planting. That corn was good to look upon on our one big field. We had bought good seed of a well-bred white dent type, planning to have this thoroughly acclimated to our conditions and to build it up from year to year by careful selection. Its spring growth promised fulfillment of the seventy-five-bushel forecast given us at the experiment station. Not a hill was miss-



ing in the field. But when the grain formed we knew we should have to wait a while for our full yield—another year, or maybe two, till the new strain would have accommodated itself to its new surroundings. That was all right with me. It was plain that we would beat last year's yield, anyway. So we did, with a harvest of a little more than forty bushels—more than three times the yield our tenant had got two years before. That was all satisfactory for the present. Most farmers in this country would have been content to let that record stand, considering everything; but after harvest Sam and I had one of our talks about the years to come.

"Sam," I said, "that's pretty good corn. The quality's away up yonder. But does it suit you?"

Sam grinned. "I'm an awful hard man to suit, when it comes to growing corn," he said. "I've never been just to say suited yet."

"Well, listen," I said. "They told me at the station that we can get seventy-five bushels on this land, if we know how to farm. We have over thirty bushels to go yet. Let's make it fifty, instead of thirty. Let's run it up to bet-

ter than a hundred. Do you reckon we can do it?"

Sam grinned again, with the frank delight he always shows in any sort of a challenge. "I'll go you!" he said. "We'll never quit till we've done it!"

And that's the way it stood with us on the corn proposition after our second crop was gathered. We were undertaking to get nine times as much grain to the acre as the tenant had harvested! I wonder if the gods of sun and wind and rain didn't chuckle quietly as they harkened to that impudent *defi* of ours.

## VII

As I read over this story, it strikes me that I may not have been quite fair in my record. I seem to have laid a very light accent upon our difficulties, giving an effect as if we had had none that counted—as if we had followed a smooth and easy path that led straight from one success to another. To give that impression is misleading.

We had our difficulties, rough ones, plenty of them. Indeed, the whole job, from first to last, has been a conquest of difficulties. I can't remember a blessed thing we've done that hasn't given us hard work or anxious thought, or both. That was the only experience we had any right to expect. There were times when the frets came in flocks. Lazy incompetence of the extra labor we were forced to hire sometimes in emergency was an unfailing source of irritation. At first we had marveled that we were able to get men to work for a dollar a day and "find" themselves—less than half the price



of day's labor in Nebraska; but the marvel swapped ends when we had tried out a dozen or so of these dollar-a-day men. In our six years we've had only two out of dozens who have earned their dollar fairly, measured by any standard of fairness you'd like to apply.

One foggy autumn morning, when the farm was shrouded in white, Laura sent one of these chaps across the farm to the pasture, to drive up the cows for milking. He was gone for more than an hour. I was strong for waiting, just for the fun of seeing how long it would take him to get back; but that grew tedious after a while. When he was located, by and by, he was burrowed snugly back into a big shock of corn fodder, sitting on the ground and calmly chewing his snuff-stick.

"I reckoned as how I'd be savin' time fer me an' the cow-critters, too," he argued, "if I'd wait till the fog riz."

Maybe the logic of that was good enough; but we couldn't quite get used to having our "hands" always sitting down at the farm work. If one would be set to picking stone, he'd head straightway for some sheltering hollow in the field where he might sit down out of sight; if we set him to clearing, he'd burrow forthwith

into the thicket and sit down; if we sent a couple into the woods with axes and crosscut saw, they'd sit madly all day long. A neighbor of ours, a newcomer, put the matter pretty well into words when he said that the prevalent disease here in the hills seemed to be the sitting sickness.

We had trouble, too, with the newly cleared ground. Did you ever try to keep a ten-acre field "sprouted down" after you've hacked off a thick growth of sassafras and black-jack and post-oak and sumac and red elm? Well, you ought to try it. I've heard prairie farmers complain of the great hardship of making a crop on virgin sod; but that's just old cheese in comparison with cropping in a mess of green roots and grubs and sprouts.

Talk about your hydra-headed monsters! A common little old sassafras bush has any hydra in the zoo backed clear off the boards at that game; and as for a spreading-rooted red elm or a thicket of sumac—oh, hush! Listen: You take your heavy hoe and go out on a warm day in spring, just when the blood of the earth has got well into circulation and the sprouts are booming, and you chop and chop and chop your way across the length of the field, leaving

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a clean six-foot swath behind you; and when you turn at the fence to look proudly back over what you've done, there the pesky things stand, four times as thick as when you started. If you think that's an exaggeration by way of a joke, come on down here and try it.

"Why 'n't ye do yer sproutin' in dog days?" the hill people used to ask of us. "If ye git 'em in the dark o' the moon in dog days, the sop'll sour, so's they won't come up no more."

So we tried it in the dark of the moon in dog days, and they came up thicker than ever. We tried it on Washington's birthday, and Thanksgiving, and the Glorious Fourth, and every other day on the calendar; and each time we tried it they came up thicker than ever. We'd get into a rage sometimes and try grubbing them out by the roots; but that was a hopeless job. Do you know the story of the little boy who was annoyed by the roar of the ocean, and who set out to stop it by dipping up all the water in his little pail and pouring it out on the sand? Well, it was something very like that with our sprouting. The little boy's remedy for his distress was simplicity itself. So was ours. All we had to do was to keep on chopping, and by and by there



wouldn't be any sprouts left. The virtue of the theory was perfectly obvious—but it wouldn't work.

And then in a fateful hour we got hold of a government bulletin on the Angora goat. That bulletin went into my consciousness as summer rain soaks into a parched soil. There were pictures in the book, pictures of broad fields before and after—dense smudges of impenetrable tangles before, and unimaginably fair, smooth expanses after. Angora goats had wrought that wondrous transformation. There was nothing to it: I just had to have a set of Angora goats.

Well, I got 'em. It was in the fall of 1910 that I met a man who owned an Angora goat ranch fifty miles back in the hills, across a couple of counties. Why, sure, he'd let me have some, if I'd go over to the ranch and drive them across country. I might have twenty-five or thirty—more if I wanted them, for two dollars and fifty cents a head. I'd have to be satisfied with wethers, and I'd have to take them about half-and-half grades and full-bloods; but, man, dear, when I got them I'd certainly have something that would eat up the sprouts! When he tried to tell me about that,

my friend's speech just went trailing off into impotent stutterings. No, no, it wouldn't be any trouble to drive 'em over; all we'd have to do would be to get 'em headed this way and keep 'em a-comin'. They ought to make the fifty miles over the woods trails in a couple of days. And when I got 'em here and turned 'em onto a mess of sprouts, farming that land after a year or so would be nothing but one glad, sweet song. That's what the bulletin said, too. There was no doubting it.

My boy and I went after our goats in November, going in the saddle across the hills to Carroll County. Louis rode Dick, our big gray work-horse, and I had Jack, the big gray mule that was Dick's harness mate. Those two beasts were the Damon and Pythias of the farm; the mule's devotion to Dick was idolatrous; in pasture or stable he clung to the horse like his shadow; he was quite unmanageable if they were a rod apart. That made a nice state of things for handling a bunch of goats in a wilderness of ragged, unfamiliar hill country.

Never mind the preliminaries. Our goats were delivered to us at the ranch gate in the gray dawn of a crisp morning. The first thing

they did was to scatter to the four winds over a perpendicular hillside. We started off right and left to round them up, the mule plunged and kicked and trumpeted his melancholy remonstrance—and that finished the scatteration. It was noon before we had them gathered. A couple of the kids were quite tired out, and we had to lift them and tie them in front of our saddles. While we were at that, the band redistributed itself. We've never seen them all together from that day to this.

We spent a week in getting our goats to Happy Hollow, and turned into our sprout patch. That was when the glad, sweet song part began. We had fenced in the patch according to the ranchman's directions, with sixty-inch woven wire and a string of barbed wire atop. That would hold 'em, he had said. So it did, for a while—just while we were getting the gate shut behind them. By the time the latch clicked, every mother's son was standing on top of a fence post, getting ready to jump. They've been jumping ever since. Oh, yes, we still have 'em; but I do certainly wish that somebody would come along and offer me something for them. If he ever does, he'll own some goats.



You know what the old farmer said about the hog-tight fence: He said it was perfectly easy to build one, but perfectly impossible to keep the hogs from getting through it. Well, there you are! We've built fence that a giraffe couldn't see over, and it's never given our goats a single moment's pause.

Eat sprouts? I'd like to know who started that story. They're fond of slippery elm when it's in just the right stage in the spring; it's quite good sport to watch them loosen a strip of the tender inner bark and then peel it smoothly off while the huskiest of the big grades straddles the sapling and bends it down. Also they like to nibble daintily at the sour berries of the sumac when they redden in late summer; and there are a few tidbits in leaves and buds they'll take if they're starved into it. But as for the real serious business of eating sprouts, that's a canard. They'll eat anything else first. They caught Sam's boy in the pasture once and ate his little blue gingham shirt off. A friend who visited us at Christmas was butted down in the lane and held prostrate while they ate up his necktie and the sprig of mistletoe he wore in his buttonhole. They'll fight for the privilege of eating a knot of dried

cockleburs out of the brush of a cow's tail. The first shake out of the box after we brought the beasts home an angry neighbor had me in town before a justice of the peace because my goats had jumped the fence and eaten his young apple orchard clear down to the ground. Once, when they got out and wandered up to the house, they ate up most of a bundle of redwood shingles. One of them ate the tail off a Leghorn cockerel that Laura meant to exhibit at the county fair; and another stole a sack of tobacco from my hip pocket and ate it up, bag and all. They ate all the bright red paint off the wheels of a brand-new farm wagon. But when it comes to staying decently in their pasture and eating sprouts, they simply aren't there. I've thought of hobbling them with ball and chain, but most likely it wouldn't do any good; they'd eat it off. I've read lately that some genius has invented a jumpless goat, but I don't believe it. That's one of the things that's too good to be true.

Do I seem to be jesting? Believe me, I'm not jesting for the mere jest's sake. We've fallen into the way of getting a laugh whenever we can out of our discomfitures, and I don't mind telling you what we found to laugh

about in that goat business; but my real purpose in referring to it is to point what it taught us.

We bought our goats in the hope that we had found a short cut through a difficulty. First and last, the short cut has cost more in time and labor and money than we'd have spent in gaining the end by plain every-day hard work. I don't want to try drawing an infallible conclusion for others to go by; but that's the way we've been served every time we've essayed a short cut. We've just about made up our minds that successful short cuts in farming are a good deal like royal roads to learning: There aren't any. We've had thirty goats working for four years on a few acres of hill-side brush patch; and this spring we're paying men to go over the land and clear up after the goats—paying as much as a good job with ax and grubbing-hoe would have cost in the first place. We've lost four years' use of the land as pasture, and we've spent unreckoned time worrying with the fences and the goats.

We had only wethers, as I've told you. That's contrary to the policy we've settled upon for the farm; excepting the mules we've really needed for the hardest work on the new





SO WE BOUGHT A SET OF GOATS



ground, we haven't intended to keep any beast around the place that doesn't contribute something through increase. When I haven't anything else in particular to do, though, I tremble to think of the fix we'd have been in if our goat herd had been multiplying on our hands through these years.

Around the rim of the farm on three sides lies a border of higher land, just like the rim of a basin, sloping inward. For the most part this slope is too abrupt to permit of cultivation; the soil would wash too badly. That part has never been in use; its unkempt appearance has made it always an eyesore. We wanted nothing of that sort inside our fence lines; yet to keep up that twelve or fifteen acres for looks' sake only was a luxury we couldn't afford. We had natural leaning that way; but we had to keep drawing the reins sharply upon our inclinations in such matters. The house grounds really gave us indulgence enough; as for the rest of the land, we were agreed that we must make every possible acre count for something. That encircling slope was quite worthless when we got the farm. For years the tenants had cut their firewood there; true to their habits they had taken the lazy way,



leaving treetops and refuse scattered everywhere to rot, so we had a lot of extra work in cleaning up the ground and trying to save the best of the young timber. Figuring out the use of that land, so that we might make it an asset instead of a liability, was one of our difficulties. The farmer who is working smooth prairie land or a good bit of valley, with its soil of a uniform type, has no problem of this sort; but on a farm like ours, with conditions changing at every fence, every field invites individual treatment. At first glance that may appear a nuisance, but there are compensations. If the farmer is inclined to be active instead of shiftless, a hill farm keeps him spurred up to doing his best. I think it's worth considering that throughout Arkansas the farmers who have bank accounts are found much oftener on the hill lands than on the rich, level alluvial lands where working conditions are much easier. I heard this remarked once, with emphasis, at a bankers' convention in the state.

Our first concern with that ragged strip of land was to get it cleaned up so we could see what it looked like. We began on the worst part, cutting out the undergrowths and the worthless scrub, leaving some of the young tim-

ber that would have value some time. It has been a continual surprise to us to find what good stuff is smothered away in those thickets. When the farm came to us it had been all but denuded of mature and serviceable timber. The sawmill men had taken their pick of it in the earlier days, and the tenants had butchered the rest ruthlessly; about all we had left was fit only for firewood, beside the young growths struggling in the ruins for life. So that we need not blunder, we had studied with care some good bulletins and handbooks on farm forestry and the management of woodlots. Save on that first clearing our foresting hasn't gone far beyond the cleaning up stage, but it will be made one of the permanent features of our work.

Out of that first thicket we saved scores of thrifty young post-oak trees—the straightest and best, for after-use in fencing. We kept also all the black locust we found, and all the cherry and black walnut, with here and there a shapely plume-topped elm. Where it did not crowd, we left the best of the young hickory, too, and the persimmon that was old enough to fruit. It will be years before that timber has commercial value; but it will all be

worth something some time. Its gain in value from year to year is paying a fair interest on our investment in the land. It would never have been worth a cent if we'd left it as it was.

Once that rough cleaning up was done, we had ten acres that didn't look at all bad. It was rather steep and stony in spots, but there was a lot of good land in between. What to do with it was the next question. A German or an Italian would have set it straightway to vineyard; slope and exposure and subsoil conditions were all exactly right for that use. But we weren't yet ready to attack commercial grape-growing. I mean to get to that before long; one of the things in the back of my head is a plan for covering that hillside with Scuppernong vines. Meanwhile, that ten acres ought to be doing something more than carry its young timber.

The puzzle solved itself without definite intention of ours. We had been perplexed over permanent pasture. Experience had shown that the native grasses had almost no value for milk cattle; those that grew in the denser woods were sparse and uncertain. As we had thought it over, we had decided against using our cultivable land in made pastures or meadows. The



length of our growing season—almost two hundred and twenty days between killing frosts in spring and fall—promised much better returns if we would use that land in the production of annual forage crops. Conditions did not fit the northern farmer's system of crop rotation, with clover and grass as important items. We could do better by double-cropping with small grains and cowpeas, filling in at odd times with catch crops of rape or sorghum or broad "succotash" mixtures to be pastured down. We were aiming at a system that would keep our cultivable fields in use to the fullest possible extent throughout the year, while allowing us to shift plans quickly at any time to suit changing seasonal conditions. Permanent pasture or meadow would be too inflexible to go well with such a system.

Yet, with the best we could do in management, there would be times in the year when we would have no crop ready for feeding to advantage. The use of the silo would settle that difficulty by and by; but for the present, despite our theory, good permanent pasture would fill some awkward gaps in spring and summer.

Our clearing of the waste hillside helped us out. So soon as the clearing was done, at once the worthless wild grasses began to be replaced by other growths. Bluegrass appeared on the moist flats along the brook bottom; and wherever the sunlight struck upon the unaccustomed ground, Japanese clover volunteered. Within a year it had formed a heavy mat, taking firm foothold, crowding into every nook and cranny between the stones. Every beast on the farm took to it as a youngster takes to candy. It is one of the first of the spring growths, and it stands well into the fall; in the sheltered places it persists even through the mild winters. The sprawling, pale-flowered buffalo clover came, too, some of the myriad-stemmed plants large enough to fill a washtub. Not much seems to be known about that clover; it has had a minor place, as the germination of its seed is said to be uncertain; but it has taken a firm grip upon our hills. Our white Dutch clover on the lawn had thrived well, and this made its way little by little up the slope. The bur clovers appeared, and the common red, and some little patches of sweet clover, till we had a mixture we couldn't have beaten with any studied planting.

On one corner of the clearing we gave Bermuda grass a lodgment, planting a few sackfuls of root cuttings brought from the townside of the mountains. There's the grass for you! It is spreading and spreading; wherever it's had a chance it has made a sward deep and thick and smooth as velvet. It knows nothing of discouragement or defeat; it's at its best right in the middle of a hot, dry summer, when almost every other pasture plant on the list has bowed its head and surrendered. Year by year it grows better and better; a five-year-old sod will carry more cattle to the acre and for a longer time than any other grass that grows. It seems a mighty pity that northern winters are too much for Bermuda. More than any other single factor, Bermuda grass promises to make the South into the great meat-producing section of the Union. Supplemented with any of the clovers, it makes perfect pasture for any growing animal.

Native southern farmers have fought Bermuda grass as a pest because, once it has established itself, it spreads and persists stubbornly. It bothers the southerner in his cornfields. But, if the farmers only knew it, there's more real money to be made in the careful grazing of an



acre of good Bermuda grass than the average southern acre of corn is worth.

Our rather aimless first work on that hillside taught us something. The poverty of the so-called pastures hereabouts isn't the inevitable logic of natural conditions; it's chargeable to the farmers themselves. The roughest of these hill lands, which are habitually left as ugly wastes, may be converted to profitable use at small cost. We couldn't make a better pasture than the one Nature made for us immediately we gave her a fighting chance. If there's one complaint more often heard than another among the farmers here it is that they can't afford to keep "milk stock" that must be given "boughten feed" all the year round. With a pasture like ours for the summer, and cowpea hay carrying a good crop of matured pods for winter feeding, besides an acre or two of fall-seeded mixed small grains and rape for winter pasturing, milk and butter may be had here all the time at as little cost as anywhere on the map. It just isn't done; that's all. At this time, late in May, our cows are in fine milk and sleek as pet rabbits; but they haven't had an ounce of grain in the last two months save

an occasional "lick" of bran given them for friendship's sake.

Our world-without-end hacking and chopping and grubbing at thicket and bush and sprout has been hard enough, goodness knows. Sam says he has the habit so firmly fixed now that he's going to be miserable when there's no more of that sort of thing to do. Once we'd set our minds to the job of cleaning up the place and wouldn't relinquish it, we got good out of it. We were taught the merit of keeping everlastingly at it, which is the very rock-bottom of successful farming; and we were taught, too, that despite its forbidding first appearance, we could set every acre of our farm at work if we would. We needn't submit to the waste of a square rod unless we chose.

There were other difficulties. Many things were to be done on the farm that called for machinery of price. We could have used machinery to great advantage many times; but we couldn't afford all at once the investment that would have been necessary. There's nothing like having the right tool for doing hard work. A cheerful temper helps some in getting along without; but there are the aches and the blisters!

The worst part of our work would have been a sight easier if we'd had a good stump puller; but I didn't feel justified in putting the money into it when we should need it for only a few months at most. There was no chance of buying a puller by clubbing with the neighbors; they had found it cheaper to let their stumps rot out. We wrestled with those rough old citizens of the field by main strength for a while, trying this way and that—burning some, and splitting out some with dynamite, and going after some with the ax. By and by we found an expedient—not a lazy man's make-shift, mind you; there's a lot of difference between the two. We cut a long, strong white oak sapling with an eight-inch butt and bound the butt end against a stump with trace-chains; then hitched our work team to the outer end of the sapling, and started them to moving in a circle. That twist must have uprooted a mountain. It brought our stump out clean.

We found other expedients that helped us through other difficulties. Some of them were a little clumsy, maybe; but we don't hesitate to use one of them on occasion just on that account, if only they lighten labor and actually cut down expense. Some of the men who have



begun farming near us in the later years haven't been hampered for money to spend on equipment—and they've spent it! It beats all how much good money may be tied up in one way and another when labor-saving becomes an obsession. I'm rather glad we haven't had all we might have liked to spend. We've gotten along just as well, and we've learned the worth of contriving.

We're agreed on one fixed rule, though, Sam and I: No mere lazy makeshift "goes."

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## VIII

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IN our six years on the farm we have sold just next to nothing at all in the way of field crops. Last fall, for the first time, we sent a little surplus wheat to market—a hundred and fifty bushels; and at the same time we let a neighbor have a ton of baled wheat straw because he needed it. That's absolutely all that's gone away from our land as raw material. Not a bushel of corn nor a pound of hay has gone out of our gates; on the contrary, we've bought corn and oats in the neighborhood, and tons of bran and shorts and other milled feeds. We've bought and fed these feeds to cattle and hogs sometimes when a prudent farmer of the old school could easily have figured that we were feeding at a considerable net loss. A bookkeeper could have proved it to us without half trying. Nevertheless we kept it up; and if you had been watching the farm as a whole, as we've watched it, I think you could be convinced that we've come out ahead on it.

If at the beginning of our work the farm had been in condition for the production of maximum crops of the field staples, we wouldn't have grown such crops for direct sale. Although we had no practical experience to guide us, years of study of the farming history of the northern prairie country had taught us one point in farm policy, a point we might not have learned in centuries of personal experience on any particular farm.

We had lived in Nebraska through the time when her farmers and the farmers of all the states around were grain-growers, producing grains for market. We had been right on the ground while those farmers as individuals and in communities, by counties and whole commonwealths, had grown poorer and poorer year by year at that business. We had seen wide districts, each an empire in itself, loaded with accumulating debt, mortgaged to the limit, and then abandoned. There was just one good reason. The farmers gave many, but they all came to the same thing in the end: Grain-growing couldn't be made to pay. And by the same token, growing grain for market, on the average showing made by all the farms of the United States, doesn't pay to-day. It



never has paid. Oh, of course, you may pick out individual farmers who have fared pretty well at it under exceptional conditions, and you may find records of exceptional years when whole neighborhoods of grain farmers have had a taste of prosperity. But I'm talking about average returns the country over, taking one year with another. For the average farmer, under average conditions, to persist in the business of producing and selling from his farm the grains and the common staples of the soil is to sink steadily into poverty until poverty engulfs him. If the farmers of a community unite in that practice, the community is impoverished and by and by abandoned for virgin fields.

That's perfectly good history, and there's perfectly good logic in it. Let's not bother too much with the statistics. Since I've been farming, just for my own satisfaction I've dug out and analyzed the figures covering the production of the staple crops in all the states since the beginning of official records. Barring some occasional fluctuations which are unimportant in proportion to the whole mass, the story of all these crops shows pretty much of a same-

ness. Just by way of an illustration, corn will serve about as well as any of the lot.

For the years from 1866 to 1910, the corn crop of the United States has had an average farm value per acre on December first of each year of eleven dollars. That takes the lean years with the fat ones, the districts of low prices with those of top prices. Only eleven dollars an acre, on an average, over a period of forty-five years! You'll agree there's not much guesswork in saying that during those forty-five years the average cost of plowing, harrowing, planting, cultivating and harvesting an acre of corn, together with the items of seed, interest, taxes, depreciation of machinery, and such-like, amounted to more than any man's eleven dollars. And that list of costs includes only fixed charges; it takes no account of extraordinary items of any sort. There's no getting away from the proposition that in those forty-five years of corn-growing the average farmer suffered a net loss on every acre of corn grown and sold from his farm. That's just another way of saying that the total crop of those forty-five years brought the farmers less than it cost them to produce it.

There's just one thing that's kept all those

farmers at work through all those years growing all that corn; and that's the happy-go-lucky way they have of keeping no accounts with their business, so that they never know how they stand in a profit and loss reckoning with any crop. When the experts publish their estimates, along in the fall, it's so very easy to say: "My, but we're prosperous this year! The farmers have raised \$10,000,000,000 worth of stuff!" But what of it? That's only about \$800 apiece for the farmers; and out of that they must pay the whole year's cost of running their business. A bumper wheat crop is needed every year for paying interest on the farmers' debts—not the profit on that crop, mind you, but the gross price. The cost of producing that wheat the farmers have to pay in some other way. A bumper corn crop, sold at average farm price, gives the farmers of the nation only \$100 a head in gross returns. The magnificence of totals that run up into billions may be mighty misleading.

I'm not setting out to be cheerless in telling the farmer's story in this way; I'm just trying to tell you how our minds worked in figuring out our theory for the management of our own farm. As I've said before, we had it settled



that we didn't want to farm unless we felt pretty sure that we could beat average farming.

We had lived through some years in Nebraska that were a lot worse than the averages I've written of—years when the corn growers got no more than twelve or fifteen cents a bushel for their grain at harvest; when the product of an acre would bring only three dollars or less. Some of them sold for what they could get; others let their crops rot on the ground rather than fool with harvesting and marketing. They made more money out of their corn in the long run than those who sold. There's the point I'm trying to get at. There's an item in the economy of corn farming that's been left out of the farmers' reckoning through all the years.

The farmers of those days—and that's only twenty years ago—who let their corn go off their farms for fifteen cents a bushel would have done better if they had turned cattle into their fields to eat up the crop at harvest—and then given the cattle away for nothing.

Every bushel of corn that's hauled away from the land that grew it takes with it fifteen cents in fertility value. If you're feeding that

corn to livestock and taking care of all manure, to be returned to the land, you're saving most of that fifteen cents. If you're not putting it back that way, sooner or later you'll have to put it back in some other and most likely a more expensive way.

So, if you're feeding forty-cent corn to growing hogs or cattle, and saving fifteen cents out of that to go back to your land as fertilizer, that part of the grain that's making the gain in weight of your animals is costing only twenty-five cents.

To put it another way: If you're selling a fifty-bushel crop of corn to a neighbor, you're giving him \$7.50 that you're not figuring on; and if you're buying the fifty bushels from him to be fed to your own cattle and hogs, you'll get that \$7.50 for the enrichment of your land, besides the profit you make in feeding.

Now suppose that's kept up for ten years. Suppose you've raised fifty bushels of corn to the acre for that time and have sold it at harvest. There's a total of \$75 an acre that your land has lost in fertility. There's no three-shell trickery about it, either; it's clean gone, and it's gone to stay. Perhaps you haven't missed it yet; it may be that your methods of

handling your soil, with deep plowing and good cultivation, have made available each year a new supply of nitrogen and potash and phosphorus, so that you've been able to take off fifty bushels of corn to the acre right along. You may do it for a few years more. But you can't keep it up indefinitely, not on the richest soil outdoors. Take away fifty bushels of corn from an acre of land every year, with nothing put back to take the place of that fertility, and the time's coming when, no matter how good a farmer you are nor how good your land was to start with, you can't do it any longer. There's the whole story of the "worn out farms" that everybody's talking about.

Liming a failing soil may put off the evil day. But lime doesn't give you new nitrogen and potash and phosphorus; it merely helps in "breaking down" some of the combinations already in the soil. The day will come when liming won't help any more. Crop rotation, too, may postpone the reckoning, particularly if you're using the nitrogen storers in your rotation; but what about the potash and the phosphorus? The long and short of it is that, no matter what your rotation, if you're growing crops and selling them all away from your



land, one of these times you'll have to change your system or take your place in the ranks with all the rest of the careless farmers who have played that careless game in that same careless way.

It's plainer if we stick to corn for the illustration. The plain English and the plain logic of it is that if you've been growing corn persistently on your fields and selling it away, you'll certainly have to put back that fertility some time; and if you put it back as commercial fertilizer, it will cost you fifteen cents or better to provide what a bushel of corn will take off. Besides, you'll not be able to make your soil as good as it was by using commercial fertilizer; to do that, you'll have to change its physical character. Feeding it chemicals won't do it.

I seem to be trying to talk like a textbook, making a lot of argument about a theory. I shouldn't be doing that if the theory didn't apply so perfectly, and illustrate itself so thoroughly by the past, present and future of our own farm. Ours was an infertile farm when we got it simply because the old practices had been followed in handling it for so long.

Up in the prairie country we had seen farm-

ing "come back" when conditions changed so as to give the farmers handy and profitable markets for livestock, and when hogs and cattle were put upon the farms to eat the crops there. That was the beginning of prosperity; prosperity could continue only upon that basis; and only those might share in it who adopted the new practice. Just about the best feature of it was that the farmers who were feeding livestock on their land and carefully putting back the manure were providing a reserve fund of prosperity whose value was all too little known. Not many of them had taken the proposition apart, wheel and spindle and screw, to see just how it worked; so they were still blundering a little; but even at that they were blundering along in the right direction.

Remembrance of that prairie farm drama, as we had seen it, gave us plenty to think about in planning our scheme here. The more we thought it over, the more it appeared that farming simply isn't and simply can't be made a business of one year's crop-growing alone, nor of the crop-growing of any number of unrelated years. That way lies failure. Through the interlocking years of the life of the farm there must run an uninterrupted, constructive

idea. The science of farming isn't merely a hodge-podge of detached facts; it's a big idea, with the facts grouped around it. The individual farm, if it's to succeed, must have something of that form. Why, you might just as well pile up a lot of bricks hit-or-miss and expect to get a finished piece of architecture as to stick to the old scrappy way of "working the land" and expect to build a successful farm.

Our concern was to *build a farm*, to make a farm that would grow richer and better and more fruitful year after year. It would not satisfy us merely to haul fertility upon the land and distribute it around. We would do that, of course, as one of the means to our end, whenever it could be done to advantage in hastening the work of putting our fields in condition for cropping; but to rely upon outside sources of fertility was too crude to serve as anything more than a temporary aid. If the success of our farm must depend upon the use of manure taken from our neighbors who ought to be using it upon their own land, and whose farms would be running down because of their failure to use it, then farming as a whole would show itself vitally weak. Do you



see the point I'm trying to get at? Well, let me put it in another way.

We had a badly run-down farm. With no great stretch of imagination you might liken it to a man whose constitution had been undermined, his vitality left at low ebb, by dissipation, or overwork, or disease, or anything you like. A man in that case might be helped over an acute attack of the Trembling Willies by a drastic use of drugs; but if he's ever to be a real man again, with the constitution and usefulness of a man, that constitution must be built up from within. The functioning of his own organism must do the trick in really getting him back to normal.

That's exactly how we looked at our problem on this farm. If there was any help for the present and any hope for the future in the new scientific farming, we must be able to build this farm up from within, provided we could hit upon the right methods.

Those methods, if they were right, must be simple, practical, reasonable; and they must render it possible to build up the farm to the point where it would begin to return a fair measure of profit upon investment and operation without too great an outlay of time and

money. That is to say, we must be able to get a "going" business under conditions and at a cost that would be justified under ordinary sensible business principles. Anybody could get the results we wanted by an unlimited use of money. That would be a job for a wealthy amateur bent upon a demonstration. Anybody might get the results eventually after a lot of experimenting with this way and that, watching for mistakes and correcting them as their effects cropped up. That would be a job for a man who had retired from active life and had taken to farming as an interesting way of killing time. But to get good results with minimum outlay of time and money—that was what we were after.

Now I swear I'm done with argument about the theoretical end of the matter. I wanted to sum up the problem for you as we faced it after a couple of years of work on the farm, when the first rough jobs were pretty well done, when our land was in condition to begin real production, and when we had had time to get ourselves past the green stage and were able to think like farmers.

Here's the answer we gave to ourselves for our problem, boiled down to the last word:

We would use thorough methods of handling the soil, as a matter of course, in plowing and cultivation, so that the texture of the soil would be improved by every mechanical means consistent with sound economy.

We would adopt a system of cropping and of crop rotation making the fullest possible use of those plants which store in the soil free nitrogen gathered from the air. These plants with their fine root systems would be of great aid in improving the soil's texture, and they would give us in abundance and at low cost that element of plant food which is the most expensive of all if bought in commercial forms.

So far as possible every cultivable square rod of the farm would be kept at work producing something at all times of the year. Here was a departure from good farming as we had seen it practiced in the North. Our milder winters compelled a change if we would make the most of conditions. Instead of hard, prolonged freezes and heavy snows that would lie for days or weeks, we would have light freezes with long, mild intervals, and our winter moisture would fall more often as rain than snow. Fall plowing and winter fallowing would only subject the fields to wash, with no

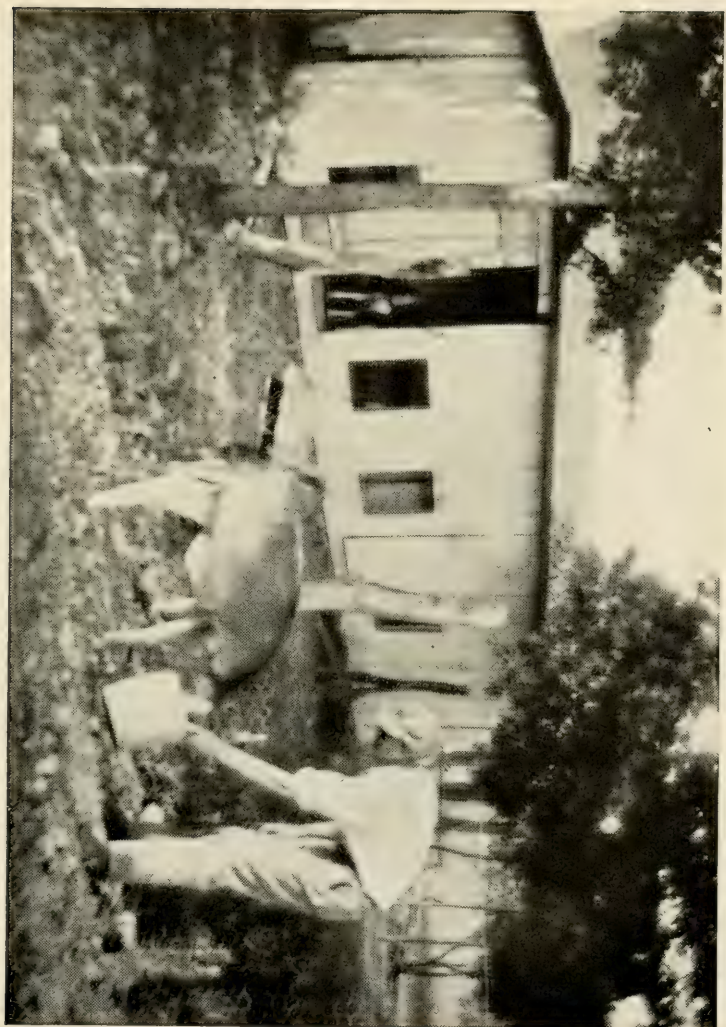


compensation. We would practice fall plowing only when the fields would carry a winter cover-crop of some sort—small grain, or rape, or winter vetch, to be pastured in winter or cut in the spring.

So far as possible, every blade and stem of everything grown on the land, even the weeds, would be turned to account—fed to livestock on the place, or returned to the soil for humus. We've had brush fires at Happy Hollow on our newly cleared land; but in all our six years no man has seen a wisp of anything burned that might be plowed under. But, oh, the fires we've seen on the lands up and down the valley! I wish I had the money they've cost the farmers since we've been here.

To the uttermost of our ability, everything needed on the farm for food of man and beast would be produced here. If at any time the field crops of hay or forage or grain would show a surplus above the year's needs of the farm, new stock would be bought to consume this surplus—hogs or young milk cattle by choice.

And then, for the ultimate rule toward which all the others tended, nothing would leave the farm save in the most finished form



INCREASE





we could give it. That means that we would sell nothing but farm-fed animals or animal products. To the limit, every direct product of the soil and every by-product of our feeding would remain strictly at home.

There, we said, was a working plan that ought really to work. It took us two good years to evolve it, to convince ourselves that it was right, that it was consistent with good sense and with itself, and that in our particular case, considering everything, it gave fair reason to expect success. We weren't doubtful of success, you understand; we were bound we'd succeed with the farm somehow; the open question had been whether this plan was the best we could fix upon for insuring success.

I think we had done mighty well through those first two years in not running foul of any of those rainbow enthusiasms—you can hardly call them ideas—which so often allure the inexperienced townsman upon finding himself suddenly possessed of a bit of land. You know what I mean—the visions of quick and vast riches to be achieved on a fraction of an acre devoted to growing zim-zim, or go-goo, or some other of those marvels of the soil. We hadn't been even tempted that way.

Once, in my newspaper days, I had been assigned to write a series of spring-time articles that would relate the happy experiences of some of our townsmen who had made good with such ventures—stories of back-yard corners that had made neat little fortunes. The stories ought to be crisp and snappy, and they must be literally true. My editor thought it would be pretty clever to spring such a series. Folks would be surprised, not to say startled, to discover that such things were going on unsuspected under their very noses.

So they might have been, if only we could have found the material. I spent two weeks looking for it. I found plenty of people who had had the vision; I found any number who had loaded up with the enticing literature of these bonanzas; I found scores who would shamefacedly admit having started a mushroom bed in the cellar, or a ginseng patch out beside the barn, or a planting of patent perpetual-motion strawberries, or a garden of high-priced herbs, or something or other; but I couldn't discover a soul who had been able to make any one of these ventures pay back even the money it had cost him to start. Reluctantly we gave up that series.

"Well, then," my editor said, "let's get something a little different. Get some stories about some of the farmers around here who have made big, quick money at farming. Something splashy and stunning and romantic—that's what I want. Go to it!"

So I went to it; but I couldn't find a single, solitary story of that sort, either, though I dug and dug and dug. I found well-to-do farmers enough, and some who were comfortably rich; but the only story they could give me was one of patient, persevering thrift, of difficulties mastered by hard thinking and hard work and—patience; always patience.

My editor abandoned his project, but that experience stayed in my memory. I'm inclined to believe it was that experience quite as much as any native good judgment that restrained me from attempting to do impossible things or expecting impossibly quick results.

But I avow and shall maintain it was good judgment that kept our energies concentrated upon one central and definite plan of operation instead of scattered over many and various ventures in quest of early cash income.

For instance, there's potato growing. There's nothing visionary about the potato.



Potato farming is solid and sound as a business. In this hill country there are potato specialists who have made good money on this one product, year in and year out. We might have justified ourselves easily in planting five or ten acres to potatoes as a revenue producer. But we didn't. We have contented ourselves with growing potatoes for farm use and no more.

And there's the strawberry. This is quite a strawberry country, and the growers who have gone about it right have found strawberry growing quite profitable. We might quite sanely have decided to cast an anchor to windward by setting out a few acres of berries. But we didn't. With all the fruits we have held ourselves down to just enough for home consumption.

There's some land on the farm well suited to celery. Well handled, that's a profitable crop, too. So is duck-raising profitable if one goes at it in the right way; so is tomato-growing; so is flower culture. There are dozens of things that promise and actually deliver profits to the farmer who puts his mind to them. We might, without being a speck visionary, have tried half a dozen of these things all at once, on the theory

that we'd be likely to make something out of two or three of them anyway. That seems like a prudent line of conduct, doesn't it? But we didn't tackle any special product on a commercial scale. Looking back over these years, I'm certainly glad we didn't.

And why? Because, once we had started on such a program, before we knew it we'd have found ourselves all "balled up" with a number of wholly unrelated projects, each one calling for special knowledge, special equipment, special care, and each carrying, beside its promise of possible profit, its own private and particular veiled threat of loss. The inexperienced man who plunges on any specialty usually must pocket losses instead of profit while he's getting experience. The production of any perishable crop in quantity for market calls for skill in growing, and also it demands keen attention to marketing. We have known many an enthusiastic beginner to be overwhelmed and utterly discouraged by having on his hands a big perishable crop he didn't know how to dispose of.

We don't intend always to leave such crops out of our reckoning. Sure as shooting, before long I'll start my vineyard of fancy table

grapes; and so soon as we have some of our land in perfect condition for it I shall undertake the production of fancy potatoes for high-class hotel trade. There are two or three other things I'd like to try on a commercial scale by and by. But those will be projects standing each on its own bottom; and before I'm committed to any one of them I'll make sure of the marketing end of the business.

We didn't want our farming in its earlier years to consist of a mixed lot of side-lines, each independent of all the others. That is, we didn't want the responsibility of managing half a dozen farms until we had found out how to manage one successfully. So we decided to stick to our stock farming; and until we would get that firmly established we would not undertake the production of any crop not directly and intimately related to the central idea of stock-growing. We saved confusion. We lived in no fear of wastes through having unsalable products on our hands; for everything we grew would be staple at all times even if we were not able to feed it all to animals on the farm. Of great importance, stock farming gave us a year practically free of periods of high excitement and extraordinary demands



for labor and such-like. At Happy Hollow we have been able to keep men and teams steadily at work the year round, with no dull intervals of idleness, and with only occasionally a need for extra "hands."

Best of all, though, stock farming enabled us to do exactly what we had set out to do—to build up the farm from within itself, to restore its wasted vitality, to make its fertility certainly and perpetually self-renewing.

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## IX

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ONCE we had as a guest the junior editor of one of the foremost farm journals of the country—a most delightful chap, alive with enthusiasm; and learned, too, in the science of farming. He knew the literature of the new farming from A to Izzard. In my talk with him I picked up no end of good, solid, meaty information; formulæ, and field methods, and suggestions about low-cost balanced rations for growing pigs, and—oh, all sorts of clever “wrinkles.” I thought a great deal of him and of his practical sense of things.

The first evening he was with us we had for dinner green sweet peppers, stuffed with something and baked. You know how good they are! Our friend liked them; he ate a second and a third with his cloved baked ham.

“Fine!” he said. “You didn’t know it, of course; but you couldn’t have done me a greater kindness than by having these peppers.

I'm very, very fond of them. But how do you get them, away out here?"

Laura pointed to the garden that lay just outside the dining-room window. "We merely go out and pick them," she said.

"Not—not here?" he questioned. "You don't mean to say that you grow them yourselves!"

Nothing would do but that he must leave the table, right in the middle of dinner, and go out to the garden to take a look at those peppers growing. It wasn't "put on," either; he was genuinely interested as he knelt to study the luxuriant plants laden with their waxy-green pods.

"It's ridiculous!" he said. "Why, I've always thought the pepper something exotic—tropical—I don't know. I pay enough for one when I have it on my hotel table at home. And to think you can have all you want, grown right here beside your house! But it isn't done much, is it?" He was quite a little "bashed" by the discovery. His mind kept coming back to it again and again. After dinner, while we smoked, he spoke without the embarrassment he had shown at first.

"I ought to have known better, of course, in



my place. That was an inexcusable lapse. But I'm not alone. We're all guilty of vast ignorance about the commonest things; the commoner and more familiar they are, the less we know about them. It's taken us ages even to observe some of the simplest phenomena, to say nothing of trying to understand them. For all our smartness, we're terribly ignorant."

I guess he was dead right about that, though he'd been wrong in his notion about the peppers. I've told you that little story, not for the sake of poking fun at him for his mistake, but because his afterthought makes such a bully statement of the sum of our own experience in ignorance. It's very curious——

Wait a minute, though! While I'm telling jokes on the professionals, there's another one I must tell. If I don't tell it now, I'm liable to forget it and leave it out altogether, which would be a pity.

There used to be a "hoss doctor" in the country here. He wasn't a veterinarian; he wouldn't have known what that meant. He was just a "hoss doctor" whose knowledge of his work had been "picked up," a little here and a little there and not too much anywhere. He managed to get along pretty well with the general

run of spavins and ringbones and "hollow-tail," taking in a dollar or two now and then, and getting some of his pay from the farmers in trade. No, he didn't do a land-office business; but it beat working, anyway.

Well, one day a farmer friend of ours had an old horse fall sick—genuinely sick. As the "hoss doctor" happened to be the only man handy who might be able to help, he was called. The case troubled him. By the time he got there, the poor beast was down and out; he was all in; he was gone up—that is to say, he looked sort of scattered, which is a bad sign. The doctor couldn't make out what was the matter.

"Ef he was only swole up some," he said, "it might be the colic. But he ain't. Nor there ain't nothin' the matter with his feet. I've saw 'em ga'nted up like that with the milk-fever; only this is a geldin'. I don't b'lieve I can make out what's ailin' him. You might try rubbin' him with turkentime; sometimes that pearts 'em up a little. If he was mine, I reckon I'd jest wait an' see how he gits."

They met in town a few days later. "Oh, say, Mister!" the "hoss doctor" said. "I b'lieve

I know now what's the matter with that hoss of your'n."

"Yes," the farmer returned grimly, "so do I know what's the matter with him now. He's dead."

"No, but listen!" the doctor urged. "I run acrost a picture in the almanac that it said had that same kind of a complaint. I don't know how you'd pronounce it, but the way it was spelled was d-e-b-i-l-i-t-y—de-bil-y-ty, I guess you'd call it. I'm tol'able sure that's what ailed him!"

That struck us as funny when we heard it; but it's not a speck funnier than many and many a "break" we made in getting acquainted with the land. It's just everlastingly interesting to me to discover how stone blind a man may be in his mind who has gone through life with his two eyes open. Wasn't it Ruskin who remarked that the gift of understanding sight is the rarest of all—rarer even than ability to think? There's a lot in that. After the experience of these years, I'd be willing to bet money, marbles or chalk that I could take any farmer I know into his own yard, only a couple of rods from his own door, and lose him completely in a maze of familiar things. Just to



show you what I mean: I've asked a score or more of commercial orchardists hereabouts if they could tell me offhand how many petals an apple blossom has, and they've guessed all the way from four to a dozen. I've talked with farmers who couldn't say for sure whether a cow's hoof is split or entire. I've talked with farmers who simply didn't know how a pea-pod is attached to the vine. I've talked with farmers who had been looking pigs in the face all their lives but who couldn't tell to save them how a pig's snout appears from the front. Extreme cases? No, they're not. You try it on the next farmer you meet. Ask him whether the germ side of a kernel of corn on the ear lies toward the tip or the butt. Ask him to tell you, in feet and inches, about how long a horse's head is from the base of its ears to its nostrils. Show him a fake picture of a potato plant in bloom and ask him to tell you what's wrong with it. Let me tell you, you have some surprises in store for you if you're expecting accuracy.

What kept bothering me for two or three years was the feeling of strangeness out of doors under the unfamiliar conditions. Inasmuch as this is meant to be a perfectly honest

story, I might as well tell you honestly that it was right here at Happy Hollow I first learned to know fear—real Simon-pure, primitive animal fear. You've felt it, most likely, at one time or another. I felt it more than once when I began to wander around over the farm and through the woods on dark nights. Silly? Why, of course it was silly; but that doesn't change the fact. In my newspaper days I'd had all sorts of face-to-face encounters with fire and flood and disaster, earthquake and wreck and sudden death, and the worst of it all had never sent a quiver of personal fear through me. I don't pretend to understand the psychology of it. Maybe it was because there was always "something doing" to keep the mind busy—action, and excitement, and bright lights, and such-like. But it was mighty different when it came to taking a foot-trail across the farm and over the mountain on a still, dark night, alone. There's no wild creature in our country bigger than a 'coon or a red fox; but there were such queer, large sounds in the thickets and the deep tangles—breathings, and stirrings, and murmurings, all the more eerie because they had no name. If you've never been against it yourself, just

fancy that you're afoot on one of those rough paths winding up a mountainside through the deep woods, without knowing where you are or just where you're coming out. There's no one with you to talk to; you're plumb alone. And it's dark—not pitch-black, but a deep, murky darkness that your eyes can get used to just enough to let you make out dimly the gray, ghostly line of the trail and the huge bulk of the hill and the vaulted trees. There's no wind stirring to make a ripple on the profound quiet; all you can hear is that pulsing, rustling quiver that is more like silence than sound.

Writers of fiction always resort to the cheap trick of making a twig snap to startle a body in such a case. That's pure buncombe. Twigs don't snap. I haven't heard a twig snap in all these years in the woods unless I stepped on it myself. I've wished sometimes that one would snap, just to break the melancholy lonesomeness. I'll tell you what does happen, though. Right at the instant when your senses are on the keen stretch and you're stumbling blindly along, more than half persuaded that you've lost your way, some little critter that's crouching beside the path—a young cottontail, more than likely—gives a sudden hop; and then you



jump; and then the rabbit jumps and goes scuttling away in a panic of wild alarm, and then the short hair at the back of your neck gets that cold, crawly feeling—and you're scared. You needn't tell me you're not, because I know better. It's all the same if it happens to be a baby-sized gray owl that sets up a sudden mocking, elfish chattering on a low branch close overhead—you're scared. I've been scared badly enough to make my heart skip a couple of beats when a fat old toad that was squatted in the middle of the trail bounced up from between my feet and plopped off into the weeds. It's not a nice feeling; it makes a man ashamed of himself when he thinks about it; but being ashamed won't stop it. That takes time; time enough to get over being an alien.

The same feeling—not of fear, but of strangeness—crept into our relations with our soil in the earlier years. I dare say every townsman who takes to farming goes at his work with a firmly fixed notion that he's going out to meet Goliath in combat—that he's pitting his intelligence against some rude, primal force in Nature that's opposed to him and that will overpower him if it can.

That's ignorance. There's nothing friendlier in all this world than the good brown earth itself if only you can rid yourself of the feeling that its forces are fighting against you. They're not. If you persist in thinking so, and persist in fighting back, you're in pretty much the state of mind of the man who stays awake all night trying to drive the little green monkey off the foot of his bed. You're seeing things that don't exist. Do you suppose that feeling may be just a survival of the old time when men believed in a tribe of gods and demons who rode the wind and the clouds and the sun and trifled with human affairs in a reckless, devil-may-care sort of way? I shouldn't wonder. There's a lot that's primitive still alive in the best of us. But maybe it's only the skittishness of plain ignorance.

There's a mighty good way to exorcise those irresponsible spirits, if they beset you and you're afraid they're going to put their spell on your land. Beat them to it! Just go courageously and serenely out, set your feet squarely on the soil and put your own spell upon it by doing some plain, every-day thinking judiciously mixed with some plain, every-day hard work! That's all there is to it.

Does that talk seem too hifalutin? I guess not. Most of you will get the gist of it, anyway. It's natural enough, I dare say, that a man should feel odd and awkward and doubtful in the first stages of a new life; but it's better to get over that feeling so soon as you can. Your work doesn't really begin until that mood is past.

All your soil wants from you is a sign that you're inclined to be friendly and that you're honestly trying to understand. Take this from me: Once that sign is given, once you do really put your mind upon your work, forthwith all the kinks have begun to straighten out. After that, you may do just what you like with your land. The soil isn't stubborn; it isn't the least bit inclined to hold back on you and to yield its secrets and its fruits grudgingly. The clay is not more plastic to the hand of the potter than the soil is plastic to the mind of the thinking farmer. He may do just what he wills with it.

There were spots on our farm that had long ago been given up as hopeless, not worth the effort of reclaiming them. No raw townsman could be more timid than our tenant had been about making those spots of some account.



He'd made up his mind that it couldn't be done, and so he didn't try.

One of those spots makes a part of the wheat field—a twelve-acre piece that was sown last fall to a fine beardless variety of red wheat. The field has been harvested to-day. On the older part, the part that was cleared and in use before we bought the farm, the yield will be twenty-seven or twenty-eight bushels to the acre; on the new part, the part we've added, we'll get ten bushels better.

The first work in clearing that neglected corner I did with my own ax, three years ago last winter. Part of it was stony, and part formed a low basin where the water would stand through the spring; but the character of the wild growths—blackberry and sumac and tangled wild grapevines—showed that the soil was rich. It was no slouch of a job to get the rank stuff cut and piled for burning, for it stood upon the ground almost as thick as the wheat itself. But it was done by and by, and then Sam came to help with the rock-hauling. We lost count of the number of loads we moved, but when we were through with it we had a rough, heavy rock wall built along the bank of the near-by creek that had been catch-

ing the wash from this field for years and years.

The first year's use of the new corner didn't amount to much. The land was so wet that we couldn't give it its first plowing until early summer was upon us, and even then the breaking wasn't what you'd call a good job. Roots and snags were too thick. We did the best we could, crossing and re-crossing it, taking every chance to let the plow go deep, tearing at the subsoil. Most farmers I think would have taken the easier way of ditching or tiling, to be rid of the excess water. Wherever we've come across such spots, though, we've tried thorough subsoiling first. Invariably we've found a clay "pan" beneath the surface that might be turned up and worked into the soil, making it possible for water to sink into the subsoil. I'd rather have it stored there for midsummer than to let it run away through a ditch in the spring. Without laying a foot of tile on the farm, we've reclaimed ten or a dozen acres here and there that the tenant hadn't tried to use at all.

In the first year we made a late sowing of sorghum and cowpeas on that recovered corner, sowing heavily so that the growth might

serve to check the sprouts from the old roots. We fed a lot of that green through the summer, and in October we got about three tons of fine hay to the acre. There's one of the happiest of hay combinations. Sorghum alone by its rank growth makes a heavy draft upon soil nitrogen and so tends to impoverishment; but if you put two or three pecks of sorghum with four or five of cowpeas, nitrogen is coming in faster than it goes out, so your soil is growing better. And when you cut your hay you have something—a well balanced ration, the cane supplying the carbohydrates which the pea-vines lack, and the vines supplying the proteids which the cane lacks. You can't beat it.

The first crop helped that new land no end, and the hay we cut was worth here about \$15 a ton. For the second year we plowed again across and across, going deeper than before and tearing out wagonloads of roots and small stumps. Our cowpea-sorghum crop was repeated, but we were able to plant much earlier, as the surface water bothered us very little. And then last fall, when the hay was cut, our wheat was sown after a new breaking and a thorough harrowing and dragging. This



spring, though we've had uncommonly heavy rains throughout the winter and the early spring months, the trouble with standing water wasn't worth mentioning; and on that reclaimed spot the wheat is heavier and finer than on any other part of the field.

We made that "go" mostly because we refused to believe, as many of the neighbors said, that the conditions were all hostile and that we couldn't fairly hope to win in a fight. In particular they told us we were all wrong with our deep plowing, that the way to handle wet land was just to "skin" it with the plow. But we knew of one example in the neighborhood of a low, wet field that had been "skun," and we didn't like the looks of it. Tenant farmers have been handling the land for years, with corn and corn and nothing but corn. It's a long time since the plow has gone deeper than three inches—just deep enough to allow of dropping the corn in a shallow bed. Almost invariably the seed is planted in thick mud. Though the soil is of a high type, that sort of treatment makes it bake badly; and the cultivator, instead of making a powdery mulch, tears it up into tough clods that bake hard as bricks. Cultivation must be abandoned before

the beginning of summer; and of course the corn has a hard fight for it through the rest of the season against heavy grass and weeds. There's no help for it with that manner of treatment. If good farmers ever get hold of that field, they'll have harder work reclaiming it from the tenants' abuse than if they tackled it quite in the rough.

We've taken great pride in working out half a dozen or more of those ugly waste places, and in doing it we've learned to waggle our fingers at all the hostile powers of earth and air. The tenants on that cloddy field below, if they're inclined that way, might easily believe that the gods are against them. The crops they get ought to go far to confirm them. What's that you say? No great harm in nursing that belief if it pleases them? Yes, but there is, though. The man who thinks that way is going to slacken his arm, and the gimp will go out of his step, and his mind will lose its bounce, and right in the middle of summer he'll own himself beaten. I'll leave it to you that that's no way. If there is any such thing as a rule for good farming, it is that the time never comes to relax effort to make something out of a growing crop.

Another of the waste corners now carries our best asparagus bed. Here ran one of the old rail fences, grown up with briars and persimmon bushes and pokeberry and carelessweed. When we had the row cleaned out it was manured and plowed as deeply as the plows could be sunk, then trenched and manured again and worked over and over. Laura set the young crowns—a quarter of an acre; a space larger than a town lot. She wouldn't have help, for that bed was to be one of the permanent assets of her housekeeping.

That was four years ago. Are you fond of asparagus? Did you ever have all you wanted? Let me ask you this: Did you ever try to keep it eaten as fast as it can come up on a well-tended quarter of an acre? You haven't done any real asparagus eating till you've tried it that way. That store asparagus—shucks! Pale, listless, stringy stuff, spindling and wilted, with only a little nubbin at one end that's fit to eat, and you have to make a nuisance of yourself at the table sucking even that little bit of "goody" out. That's no way.

When we have asparagus for dinner, it's cut late in the afternoon, so it may go on to cook before the fresh, snappy crispness has gone



out of it. Cutting the mess is my job. The thin, thready sprouts don't go into the basket; they're left on the ground. What I'm after is the lusty, vigorous shoot, thick as your thumb, that's made its six or eight inches of growth since morning and is standing straight as a soldier. I don't thrust my knife clear down to the crown in cutting as the market growers do, but cut close to the surface, well above all woody fiber. To the last fraction of an inch it's brittle and tender as a lettuce heart, and so full of juice that it drips. Now, you take asparagus like that, and let it be cooked just to the careful turn where it loses its raw taste without losing its firmness, and then let it come upon the table well drained and dressed with sweet butter and a dash of pepper and salt, and all piping hot—man, man, but that's eating! It takes a big dishful to go round at our house, and even then I'm always nervous lest it give out.

Just one good spring dinner with asparagus a-plenty pays in delight for all the work we've done on that bed—and we've had a hundred of those dinners since the bed was set. And that, mind you, was made out of an odd patch of ground that nobody had ever thought worth

working over. Our vineyard, too, stands on one of those redeemed corners; and last year we had cantaloupe and watermelons on another—melons by the hundred; rich, deep-fleshed, luscious fellows stretching over a season of weeks and weeks through the hot middle of summer when nothing else will quite take the place of a good melon. We're fonder of our Rocky Fords than of anything else that comes out of the garden—unless it's a platter of plump, sweet, tender Country Gentleman corn—or maybe a creamy cauliflower. I don't know: new potatoes and sugar peas aren't bad, if they're brought in right fresh from the vines without a chance to wilt. A dead ripe, meaty tomato sliced over a buttery, crisp lettuce-heart is pretty good, too, especially when you flatter yourself that you know how to mix a French dressing that's just the least bit better than anybody else's. And did you ever eat a sauce of tender young beets dressed with good butter and homemade peach vinegar creamed up together? You ought to try that. Oh—and I'm near to forgetting the cucumbers. Maybe you don't know how good a cucumber can be. Most people don't. Most people are perfectly willing to tell the grocer over the

telephone that they want some cucumbers—he's just to pick out a couple of nice ones—and then they're stolidly content with what they get. One of the two will be a big, bloated thing, turning yellow on one side and as tough and tasteless as a piece of blotting paper, and the other a grass-green little affair with one end shrunken and twisted over like the neck of a gourd. And those are cucumbers! It serves a body right for expecting to get cucumbers out of a grocery store.

There's only one place to get a real cucumber, and that's right fresh from a real cucumber vine in a real garden. Not any old cucumber vine will do; it must be a real one. The hill it grows in must have been built up to the very pink of perfection in soil; the seed that's planted in the hill must come from the cucumber aristocracy; and from the day it thrusts its first tender leaves out of the ground the plant must have the most unremitting care. It must be nursed, and watered, and forced to its quickest growth, and then be nipped back so that its whole succulence and vigor will go into a chosen small number of fruits. When those fruits are ready they'll be good to look at—straight and plump and just of a certain inde-



scribable shade of tender green that isn't seen anywhere outside a garden. On the last day they'll grow like soap-bubbles; between morning and evening, if you aren't watchful, they'll reach the line of perfection, leap over it, and be far on the downward road. If you want one at its best, you'd better mark the leaf it lies under and then go out every once in a while and take a peep. When you catch one just right, let me tell you you're a lucky man. Nobody on earth will have anything on you at dinner that night.

It just does beat all what you can get out of the warm, mellow earth if you'll only forget the ignorant old notion that to work with the soil is a bitter contest against tremendous odds. If I felt like that, nothing could hire me to strike another lick at farming. I'd be all through, right now. But, feeling as I do, nothing could make me quit it. In sober truth, the ancient saying that men have been taking so hard, "in the sweat of thy brow," is a benediction instead of a curse.

We found that out in our third year at Happy Hollow. I think that was our critical time. In that year all fear passed. Instead of the grim will to make our farm succeed, we

were beginning to enjoy the fullness of realization. That couldn't have happened until we had put aside our lurking fear, which is the most inexcusable form of ignorance.

I'VE told you something about Jake, our hill-man friend who used to chop wood for us once in a while when his meal-sack was empty. I've told you, too, that poor Jake is dead. He was an odd chap; but there was no bad in him, so he must have been all good.

His mother has just been down to see us. She doesn't know how old she is, but she is a very old woman, much stooped and all shrunk away in her husk. She always makes me think of a line of Knickerbocker History which observes that if a woman waxes fat as she grows old her tenure of life is precarious, "but if haply as the years pass she wither, she lives forever." That's what Jake's mother seems in a fair way of doing. She must be well on toward ninety; but her eyes are bright with an unquenchable brightness. There was a new light in them this morning.

She was very fond of Jake and very proud of him, for a reason mothers have. Sometimes



it's not easy for an outsider to understand. His death hurt her terribly. He wasn't her support, he didn't contribute the meal and meat she ate; but in a way he helped her to get her living. Up to the time of his taking off, he and she were used to working together in the woods, at either end of a crosscut saw, cutting firewood at so much a "rick." Jake would find the jobs and then let his mother take a hand. She is still able to swing a heavy double-bitted ax like a veteran woodsman. I'm afraid she's going to miss Jake more than she knows. It isn't every man who's willing to hunt up work for so old a woman, even if she happens to be his mother.

When she came down this morning she carried clutched in her lean hand a little wad of feathers crumpled and twisted together in a loose sort of rope. She was excited and eager when she held this out to let us see.

"That thar's Jake's crown!" she said in a kind of elated awe. "Yist'day I ripped open the piller he used to sleep on, an' I found thish-yere, jest like I'm a-showin' it to you. Hit's a shore sign Jake's gone to Heaven an' is a-wearin' a crown up Yonder. My ol' Mammy tol' me that, an' she was a heap older woman

than what I be, an' she knowed. Yes, sir, she knowed!"

Once, two or three years ago, when the winter snows were too heavy to let her do much work in the woods, she was pretty hard put to it for a time. She used then to come down to Happy Hollow in the mornings to get a little milk. She wouldn't take it as a gift, and we had learned to know her fine pride too well to insist upon it. She kept tally some way; and then one morning when a mild spell had set in she appeared with her ax over her shoulder.

"I come to pay for that thar milk you-all been lettin' me hev," she said. "Hit don't do for folks not to pay for what they git, jest because they're pore." Nothing would do but that she must spend the long morning on our woodpile. What could we say? We let her do as she wanted. She's a brave old soul! Her whole life has been stripped down to the bare bones of hard need, with never a moment's hand-grip on even the least of life's advantages. In all her years she has never read a word nor seen with her own eyes anything that lies beyond the rim of the hills that shut our neighborhood in. What she knows of Holy Writ has come to her obscurely in roundabout

ways, by poor word of mouth, mixed with chaff and tares and smudged by the murky logic of the interpreters. You'd be likely to say that the path of her life hasn't been lit by any direct illuminating rays. In spite of that she has managed to keep a stanch steadfastness, a simple piety, an almost fierce loyalty to her standards. Don't call it crude. Such virtues are never crude. To be frank, I don't feel entirely sure on that point of Jake's crown; I'd rather take chances on his mother's, even without a sign or a portent to guarantee it.

Just about the best of the values we've got from our life at Happy Hollow has been the human value. I used to think I knew people pretty well and could judge their motives fairly; but that was only a townsman's conceit. Looking back, it's no trouble to see how mistaken some of those old notions were—pitifully one-sided, thin-blooded, bad-tempered. One's judgments of men change, not so much because the men themselves grow better or worse, but rather because his own motives and manner of judgment change. My way of measuring folks has grown kindlier; that's how I know it's juster, better.

If you're inclined to insist that the way to



come at an opinion of a man is to pick the flaws in him and find out his weaknesses, you're not likely to be happy in a country neighborhood. I don't know why, but that way won't work in a country neighborhood. Maybe it's because the countryman falls into a calmer habit of mind, so that other people may have their little faults without irritating him. Maybe it's because neighbors are so few in the countryside that we can't afford not to hunt out the best we can find in each other and dwell upon that. Whatever the reason, the associations of the country are a lot simpler and freer than in town. There's less of show about us, and so less of the silly discontent that mere show breeds. Only once in a long time does any of us pretend to a social "affair"; mostly we just visit round in the plain country way, taking each other as we're found without the "dog." Of course that gives us more time and better chance for finding what's real and worth while in each other; and that's all that counts, isn't it?

Oh, yes, we have our little spells of being offish, but they don't last. Often enough one or another of the folks around here has miffed us a bit or given us excuse for talking him over

and saying to ourselves how "queer" he was; but that talk has always taken the other tack before we were done with it.

"Never mind!" That's the way we're apt to sum it up. "He's a good neighbor, take him altogether. We shouldn't want to get along without him." And at that we're not trying merely to make the best of a poor business. Our feeling for our neighbors amounts to good, simple liking. That's the way it ought to be. You can't get good from a man—no, nor do him any good—by holding him in low esteem. Out in the country we easily get into the way of weeding the garden of our social relations as we weed out our kitchen gardens and our flower beds, keeping them as free as we can of nettles and cockleburrs. It's not hard work, once you get used to it, and it gives you much to enjoy.

We've been out of sorts, time and again, over something we felt to be a lapse in neighborliness. We have a "stock law" here in the hill country which requires every farmer to keep his animals inclosed and makes him liable for damages if they're allowed to stray. It's a good enough law on the books, but it's observed mostly only in the breach. Arkansas

folk have never grown used to building good fences nor to keeping them up. When the "natives" lived on the farms around us, their cattle and pigs and mules were always wandering in and tasting our growing crops. That's irritating; no farmer likes it. We used to get quite angry about it sometimes, when it appeared that arguments and warnings did no good. I suppose that anger was the townsman's habit persisting. You know you'd fuss with a man if he lived on the next town lot to yours and if his cow would come over and muss up your lawn or trample your lettuce patch. Without half trying you could work yourself up to heated words and strained relations. That's because you'd be able to get to him right away before your temper would have time to simmer down. But it would be different if he lived half a mile away across the fields and woods. Even if you set off at white heat to see him about it, and rehearsed to yourself all the way what you'd say to him, by the time you got there you'd be cooled off in spite of yourself, and your quarrel would be resolved into nothing fiercer than a friendly glass of cold buttermilk and a bit of friendly chat about the look of the crops, with maybe a few words



at the last of mild suggestion that you really ought to be getting together somehow about that division fence. That's the way we've found it. I don't take any stock at all now in the romances about family feuds arising over boundary lines and trespasses and such like. They aren't reasonable among farmer-neighbors.

There was one old man on a farm down the valley who was a steady offender. He wasn't exactly a farmer, though he lived on a farm; that is, he didn't work at farming. He owned a few cattle that rustled a living as they could on the poor brush-land he called his pasture. The pasture was inclosed in a happy-go-lucky sort of way by a few strings of rusted old wire; but half the posts were rotted out and the wires sagged along the ground or were caught up and held in the tangle of bushes. The cows found it no barrier; they strayed where they would, and they were always coming into our crops. The old man had no time to fix his fences; he was too busy sitting on his porch figuring out easy ways to get rich—if he only had money enough to get some of his schemes a-going. He was desperately poor, as poor

as his cattle, but his unfailing visions kept him buoyantly cheerful.

I liked the old chap; but I couldn't manage to match his cheerfulness with those cows wandering over the place. When their own pastures grew short, they'd visit us two or three times a week. Always the old man was full of gentle sorrow; always he promised that it wouldn't happen again; but it kept right on happening until one day we shut the beasts up and sent our neighbor word that he must pay for the damage done. I was just hot enough to insist upon it when he came over to see about it. He was genuinely distressed. He had no money, he said, but if I'd let him take his cows home he'd "work it out" on the farm. He worked for half a day at a couple of odd jobs, then borrowed a couple of dollars for some pressing need at home—and the next day the cows were back again.

We stood for that sort of annoyance so long as the easy-going folk of the old school were about us. It didn't hurt us any. It was good, human discipline. We came through those experiences on friendly terms with everybody, though we never got used to their ways, nor they to ours. That isn't necessary, is it? The

best of life is give-and-take. Nobody really thrives on having everything his own way. That's plain enough; but we had to come to the country to learn it.

We entered upon our fourth year of farming with forty acres of our land in fine condition for cropping, clear of the old stumps and stone, the soil so greatly improved in texture by successive deeper and deeper breaking that we could be sure of passing through dry weather unharmed. The burning summer winds that sometimes blight the prairie country to the west of us never come into our hills, but occasionally we have a dry spell rather long drawn out. We've had one this year, and this has shown as well as anything could the advantage of handling our soil in our way.

When I began writing this story it was early May. Our corn was then six inches high. It is now the middle of June. A fine, soft rain has been falling steadily for twenty-four hours, every drop of it going into the ground. This is the first rain we've had in five weeks. Our corn is now waist-high, its foliage of that rich black-green the farmer likes to see. Not a leaf has curled; not a plant in the field has halted in its vigorous growth. We're mighty glad the



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rain has come, of course; but its delay hasn't hurt our corn a nickel's worth.

It's very different on some of the farms around us. Yesterday morning, before the rain began, I looked at two fields that were planted when we planted ours. Both those fields have been badly hurt by the drought; the plants are not more than half the height of ours, and their leaves are sun-dried, pale and sick. With the best of care for the rest of the season that corn won't make half a normal crop.

The reason? That land was plowed only about four inches deep, and the subsoil wasn't touched. Cultivation was abandoned two weeks ago because the teams couldn't pull a "double shovel" through the sun-hardened soil; so the fields are foul with weeds. The weeds have drawn heavily upon the little moisture that was stored, and the loss by evaporation has been great. On the contrary, we have kept the cultivators going steadily every day of those five dry weeks, stirring the surface into a fine, shallow dust mulch to cover our foot-deep seed bed. On the hottest day of the drought if the mulch were kicked aside the soil beneath appeared black with abundant mois-

ture. The field has been kept absolutely free of weeds, so we aren't put to it now to catch up after a time of dispirited neglect. One more cultivation and our corn is "made"—and it will be a top-notch crop. You needn't tell me that this way of doing things isn't right or that it doesn't pay. I'm ready to bet that this year at Happy Hollow we'll beat the average corn crop of the state at least four to one.

Our fourth year gave us the proof on this corn practice, if we needed proof. We had twenty acres of our best land in corn that year, and it was given the same care our field has had this year. In that year we found that the mark we'd set of a hundred bushels to the acre wasn't a crazy vision. A part of our field, where the plows had gone deepest and the subsoil conditions were best, made a surprising showing for itself as the season advanced. It came mighty near being perfect corn, almost entirely free of barren stalks, the long plump ears well set low on the stalks. At harvest a measured acre gave us one hundred and ten bushels of as fine grain as any farmer would want to see. The rest of the field had received the same attention in cultivation and in every other particular, following the spring break-

ing; but there was still some stone in the subsoil, preventing a deep and thorough stirring. There lay the whole of the difference in conditions. July of that year was a dry month, too, and though the ears formed pretty much alike over the whole field, there wasn't moisture enough in the shallower bed to mature them well.

In that year we gave thorough trial to the "wide row" method of corn culture which the Government experts are advocating for the South. You know what that is, I reckon. Instead of having the rows four feet apart and the hills three feet apart in the rows, after the usual farm practice, the rows are spaced to six feet and the hills to two feet. Both spacings give twelve square feet of ground to the hill, so there is no difference in the number of hills an acre will carry. Advantage is claimed for the six-foot row because the cultivator may be run throughout the growing season. A row of cowpeas may be planted between each two rows of corn, and if the cultivator is made to straddle the pea row both crops are given attention at once. It's a fine theory, and it works well in practice; but this year we're back to the old three-by-four system. This enables us



to run the cultivators in both directions and to keep the rows entirely clean of weeds through spring and early summer. In a dry time like that we've just been through a heavy growth of weeds in the rows would have done a lot of harm by wasting moisture the corn needed. We're strongly "agin" weeds in our crops at Happy Hollow. I've had many chances for measuring the advantages of both methods in all parts of the state on the lands of good farmers, and I haven't been able to find that the new has anything on the old at harvest time. A clean field after harvest counts for a lot with us. So there's one proposition in which we'll follow the old fashion against the new.

That's been our rule on the farm—to try without prejudice any new cropping method that gives a reasonable offer of better results, but not to persist in it to our own cost just because it is new. We've know men who seemed to think they weren't practicing modern farming unless every scrap and shred of every idea in use belonged to the twentieth century. That's foolish. There's a great deal of good sound usage in the "old" farming. Indeed, so far as I've been able to discover, modern farming consists simply in doing the old things

in a more intelligent and businesslike way. Nature's laws are very ancient and firmly settled. The scientific farmer hasn't grafted any new laws upon her code; he's tried only to get a better understanding of the old so that they might be better observed. The real service and the real inspiration of modern farming lies simply in stimulating the farmer to think about his work—to keep his head on the job as well as his hands. There's nothing dark or mysterious about this "science." The business of feeding the world must go forward. That work is piling up on us with greater and greater demands. The time is clear past when a surplus of foodstuffs here or there need go unused. Supplies will have to be increased. There's the fact that has brought the farmer fully into the big task. The thinking and planning of the task isn't to be left now altogether to middlemen and distributors. The farmer himself is taking a thinking part. Conditions are compelling him to think about increased production, lowering of costs, elimination of wastes, and saving of profits for himself. The new farmer differs from the "old" farmer only in being trained to think up to the times instead of in the past. They're not distinct breeds, as



THERE WAS A NEW GLORY UPON OUR OWN HARVEST FIELD





some folk would have you believe. The most hardened "old" farmer of the lot may shake himself awake into a "new" one whenever he will. It's a good deal like "getting religion." We don't leave that to our sons on the theory that we're too old to learn better morals. It's a mistake to argue that only the school-trained youngsters may be modern farmers. The old-timers are dead wrong in supposing that modern farming is made up wholly of a lot of new-fangled notions. It isn't. It's just the old farming with new life put into it.

You see I can't help quitting my own story once in a while to take up a bit of argument; but all the time I'm thinking of its bearing on our farm operation. We couldn't get anywhere in our farming without an occasional spell of argufying and theorizing.

We did a lot of it in our fourth year. That was the time when it was borne in upon me that the difference between profit and loss in farming hangs upon a slender peg. The farmer who isn't minding his p's and q's may make or lose money without knowing how it happens. That's particularly true in what's known as "general farming." The man who's sticking to one project—poultry, peaches, potatoes

or pigs—is able to keep a closer watch upon possible leaks and losses than he who has half a dozen irons in the fire. The average “general” farm leaks like a sieve, and it’s very hard to discover the flaws. It needs a wizard to check one operation against the other and keep the reckoning straight.

In our fourth season I tried to figure out a system of accounting that would enable me to strike a balance at the year’s end and determine with a fair degree of accuracy how much money I had made or lost in growing my oats and corn and peas. I couldn’t do it. I haven’t been able to do it to this day. I don’t believe it’s possible. The cleverest method of reckoning has something arbitrary and artificial in it—something that must be taken for granted. The balance must be forced. On a farm one gets so many things that can’t be measured in dollars and cents. And there are the endless losses by leakage which can’t be estimated.

At the beginning of that fourth year I laid out a plat of the farm on paper, with each field measured in acres, and with a carefully studied schedule of a cropping system that would cover the next three years. That was all right enough, but before the middle of summer I



had to consider a number of things that weren't to be foreseen by any uninspired farmer.

Our pigs got away from us. From a modest beginning with a few good brood animals our herd had increased to a hundred head of sows and pigs. Our losses by death had been next to nothing at all. On its face that's a fine exhibit. Almost anybody could take a stubby pencil and a scrap of paper and figure himself rich at the end of a few years at that rate of increase. Two broods a year, six pigs to the brood—why, that's 1,200 per cent. increase, isn't it? And a money-lender gets rich at eight or ten per cent! What's the matter with farming?

Nothing at all—nothing but the chance of losing several thousand per cent in taking care of that increase and bringing it up to marketable condition. A growing pig is the most deceiving beast in the catalogue. His gain in weight may cost you two cents a pound or twenty or forty. That depends upon your management.

We had too many pigs, considering the condition of our farm. If we had let it go on at that rate, we'd have had five or six times as

many at the end of another year. But the farm wasn't ready to take care of a hundred at a profit. We might have managed according to the usual farm practice, shutting the pigs up in a dry lot and pouring in corn and corn and corn. That wouldn't have paid. An uncomfortable, discontented pig will squeal away a peck of corn in a day. The profit in pig-growing is made while the animals are putting on their first two hundred pounds of weight on green pasture—clover or peas or small grain or rape. With the plantings well managed on good land, that growth ought not to cost more than two cents a pound. The "finishing" twenty-five or thirty pounds made on corn feeding with a vigorous animal costs six or eight cents a pound. If the pig is brought up on corn only from the time he's weaned till he's baconed, you may have four times as much money tied up in him as you'll ever be able to get out. Well, what about it? Isn't that a situation that calls for some thinking?

We hadn't any money to lose. We cut down our herd, a few head at a time, till we had it trimmed to the point where our pastures would carry the animals that were left. We kept about twenty, besides those that were to be fat-

tened for making our own meat. These twenty were carefully selected, and with the herd I put a new male of a registered line, bought in Kansas. He came of a prolific strain, famous for getting thrifty pigs that would make maximum gains on good feeding. You ought to see that boy to-day, if you have any doubts as to the value of good breeding in meat animals on the farm. He's just a little more than two years old, but he's as long as a cow and weighs six hundred pounds. When he's put in "show" condition for the county fair next fall he'll weigh all of eight hundred pounds. He's some pig! It's hard to believe that he belongs to the same tribe as the native hogs we've seen in these hills. Did you ever notice a genuine Arkansas hog? He's not big enough to eat till he's four years old. He's built on the lines of a race horse—slim and limber and high off the ground. He runs free in the woods, and at butchering time the hill people hunt down their meat with hounds and gun. When you cook a strip of the bacon you have to use store lard to fry it in. That's no joke. I've seen a couple of pig hunters come in from the chase with half a dozen carcasses hanging from a stick swung



across their shoulders. It's only by courtesy that you can call such beasts "domestic animals." The only living creature that ever made me climb a tree was an old white sow I met once on a woods trail. Such hogs haven't anything at all in common with our huge, mild-tempered Happy Hollow Bob. The difference is all in the breeding. Old Bob gives a good account of every pound of bran and middlings and corn that goes into his trough; but I've seen native hogs that wouldn't show any effect at all of such feeding beyond swelling up in the middle.

Finding myself overstocked with hogs, with a surplus that might not be handled profitably, didn't decide me to get out of raising pigs. It did set me to analyzing the business as closely as possible in an effort to find its strength and its weaknesses. I believe my conclusions right. These conclusions apply pretty well to every operation on a farm like ours.

Much of the danger of disappointment and loss in small farming lies in the margin of surplus which the farmer is likely to find in his hands from time to time, a surplus which can't be handled to advantage on the farm and which is too small to justify great care in mar-

keting. He may have a few extra head of pigs that can't be put in marketable condition at a profit and that must be sold for what they will bring close by. He may have a few extra bushels of apples or potatoes. It's a pity to let them waste; but there isn't enough of the stuff to pay for hunting the best possible market. Counting time, the only thing to do is to peddle it out for what it will bring on the local market—and country town markets for farm produce are almost invariably in the hands of small middlemen who don't like to pay profits to the farmer. Those little jags of surplus almost inevitably spell loss to the grower. That loss is the very thing that has discouraged many and many a townsman in his essay of farming.

My own study of the matter has had the pig for its object. I've settled it just this way in my own mind:

I'll breed no more pigs than the farm is able to carry to maturity with its own pasture and forage crops. I want to avoid a surplus that must be fed at a loss or sold at a sacrifice. If there's ever a surplus of pasture or feed on the place it will be easy enough to get extra pigs to consume it. According to that method my

herd will not be large. I'll break no records with the number of animals handled. But every beast in the herd will be handled at a real profit, and there will be no losses to set off against the profits at the season's end.

I'm going farther than that with the pig business. Two years from now I shan't be selling a live pig off the place save as I have one now and then that will bring a fancy price for breeding purposes. Two years from now every pig that's bred and grown and finished on the farm will be converted right here into fancy hams and bacon and sausage, and these products will find their way straight to consumers who are able to know a good thing when they get it. We've tried this in a small way, and we know it will work. Every penny of profit that's made in that business we'll be able to keep for ourselves. The danger of loss will be practically wiped away. I want to say something more about that before I'm done with the story.



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## XI

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THIS is June twentieth, right at the zenith of the long summer days. Sam has had a grouch since early morning. You wouldn't know it unless you knew him. Most Irishmen have a way of cutting loose when they're hot about something—using fiery words, or slamming their tools around, or yanking at their beasts at the plow. That isn't Sam's way. The madder Sam gets the quieter he is. When he's really in a rage you'd hardly know he's about. He moves very softly and speaks not at all. And man, dear, how he does work when one of those fits is on him! I shouldn't care if he stayed mad all the time through the rush season.

We've been stacking our wheat to-day, to have it ready for the threshers. There are two young mountains of it, mighty rich-looking in their deep golden yellow. It was hard work to build them, though; hot work too, along in the middle of the day, in the brilliant glare of

the summer sun. The thermometer was a shade over ninety, and the lazy breeze merely crawled across the land. No matter what a man's disposition, he's bound to feel uncomfortable in the fields on such a day.

The slow mood of it got into the workers. We wanted to get the wheat shocks off in a hurry so the plows might be at the land while it's still mellow from the fine rain of Wednesday. Our cowpeas ought to be seeded on the newly turned stubble within the next couple of days. As we saw it, there was good reason for hurry.

The extra helpers didn't want to hurry. They picked up the pace of the listless air and crawled with it. Three of them couldn't throw the bundles upon the load as fast as Sam could handle them. They moped. They stopped often to wipe away the sweat and to measure with unfriendly eyes the part of the task still undone. They'd much rather have had a half crop than a bumper.

"Wusht I c'd quit an' go swummin'," one of them lamented after dinner. "Thish-yere work would keep twel Monday. Hit's too hot."

That was Oscar talking. Oscar had had his

board for the week, and he'd done work enough to set him three dollars ahead; so he had a fine, large, easy feeling that didn't match up at all with the labor of the harvest field. Another of the men did quit after an hour's work in the afternoon. He had to go into town and loaf a little while on the "square" before the day was done. That's a firmer habit here on Saturday afternoons than going to church on Sunday. Pretty soon another hand laid off. Whenever one of them stopped Sam quickened his own gait to make up. He didn't speak his impatience, as another man might have done; he just shut his mouth and worked. The wheat was all in stack when night fell. The last bundles went up in murky half-darkness; but the job was done.

Sam was tired when he brought up the team to the watering trough at the well. He didn't have to tell me; I knew. While the beasts drank he lounged wearily on the end of the trough, looking away across the twilight fields. He wasn't saying a word, but there was an air about him of temper smoldering.

"Well," I said, "it's finished anyway. That's some comfort."

He grinned. It takes a pretty good man to



grin like that right in the middle of a grouch. "Yes, that's some comfort," he agreed. "But there's not comfort enough in it to keep me from being mad. I'm mad."

"Forget it!" I said lightly. "This is Saturday night. You'll have a good rest to-morrow."

"I don't want to rest," he snapped. "I don't care if I never rest. I don't get mad because I have to work hard; it's because the other man don't want to. If he'd hold up his end—— And I don't seem to get ahead at it any faster than he does."

"You get a steady job," I said.

"I get a steady chance to keep right on workin' my fool head off!" he retorted. "And I like to loaf as well as the next man too, when I can see my way to it. I ain't sure they haven't got the best of it."

Well, that's an old, old question, of course; but it's everlastingly a live, brand-new question on the farm, where you can't possibly see instant results of your work. The curious thing about it is that the more forehanded you are and the busier you keep, the less chance there is of measuring effects. So many, many "ifs" creep in!

There's that wheat stacking, for example. Rushing it through bred dead weariness of body and heaviness of spirit. It might have been just as well to let the last of the job lie over to another day and come at it then in better temper. But we really ought to have the peas planted without the loss of an hour, so they'll use every drop of the moisture that's in the soil. A stubble field will bake hard in a hurry in this sun if it isn't turned and harrowed. There's no telling when we'll have another rain. Tons of water will be sucked up out of the ground on a hot June day. Those tons of water will make a sight of difference in the start our pea vines get, and a difference of tons of hay in the fall. Nobody knows. The safest way to play it was the hardest way, the way that wouldn't make any compromise. It took the sap out of the men and put them all out of sorts with their taskmasters; but we've gained a day at the height of the year. If we can gain a few days more in the same way before mid-July those days may easily settle whether our mows and stacks are half empty or full to bursting for the winter.

What's that? It's a gamble, either way? Are you right sure of that? That's what the

laborers thought to-day. But as I think of it, it doesn't strike me that way.

Farming is a gamble only when the farmer takes gambling chances. We might have taken one to-day. Maybe we'd have won, maybe we'd have lost. It was a toss-up. We made it less of a gamble when we cut down the loss chance. It's only when he refuses to take any loss chance at all he can avoid that the farmer dare call himself scientific. Isn't that right?

If there's any doubt in your mind, look over the farms of the men who take chances and those who don't. There's a case in point in our neighborhood right now. One of our neighbors grew twenty acres of oats. His land was in bad condition in spring—full of stones and stumps, as ours was six years ago. He couldn't make a real seed bed, of course; he just scratched his seed into the surface. Chance number one. He got a poor stand. The recent drought caught his crop and made it certain that the grain wouldn't mature, so he cut it for hay while it was in the milk. He tore a mowing machine to bits in the cutting—he thought he could dodge the stumps and bowlders, but he ran into them every once in a while. Chance number two. He lost lots of



his hay because his rake wouldn't work clean on the rough ground. Because he wasn't fond of the burning middays he put most of the hay into the stacks in the cool of the mornings before the dew was well dried off, and he built the stacks in a shady place. Chance number three. His stacks are heating badly; they're bound to rot if they aren't torn down and dried out and rebuilt. At that his hay will be blackened and poor in quality.

Just across the fence our oats ripened perfectly, and we'll thresh a real crop. We refused every one of the chances our neighbor took. We got our seed where he got his, and the fields were planted at the same time. Acre for acre, we'll have twice as much straw as he has hay, and we'll have our ripe grain besides. There's just the difference.

And there's the question of the second crop following the small grain. Some of my neighbors have laughed at me for that practice. Not many of them observe it themselves. They say it's too risky to plant cowpeas in the middle of summer, after wheat and oats harvest—that if the season happens to be an “off” one they won't get hay enough to pay for the seed. They insist that we're taking the gambler's

chance when we plant so late as the first of July.

The way we look at it, we can't afford not to take that chance. If we allowed our fields to lie idle through the long summer months, we'd simply be betting on a dead certainty of losing. As a matter of fact, our midsummer cropping hasn't proved a risk. In five years we've failed only once in getting a crop of pea vines heavy enough to cut for hay. That failure was on one small field which wasn't seeded until mid-July; and on that we got our money back by pasturing and plowing under the stubble for wheat in September. If we got nothing from the peas but the new nitrogen stored at their roots, we'd keep on planting them. If we gained no advantage but the finer tilth the plowing and harrowing and dragging give for the crop to come after, still we'd keep on planting them. Considering the practically unfailing hay crop on top of these benefits, don't you think we'd be taking a foolish chance if we didn't plant?

Most of the cases of this sort on the farms, with the farmers declining such chances, have their root in shiftlessness and not in good business prudence. "I've worked enough for this

year.” There’s the easy formula that halts many a farmer at his work in mid-year, just at the point where profit-making might begin. It’s the rule rather than the exception down here to consider that the working season on the land is done when corn is “laid by.” Then comes a gap of months when the farmer fills in with occasional odd jobs for somebody else. That’s habit rather than necessity. It’s a bad habit, for it almost inevitably means loss. The farmer simply bets that he’s going to lose, and then sets about winning his own bet.

We’ve found a thousand chances at Happy Hollow for betting against ourselves in just that way. We’ve taken some of them to our cost. It’s not easy to keep an eye on all the odds and ends on a hundred and twenty acres and have everything done on time. Once we killed a horse by turning him into a newly fenced pasture where there was a loose strand of old wire lying on the ground in a brush-grown corner. We were crowded for time! we thought we could safely put off that last detail of inspection for a day or so. We took a chance that cost us a hundred dollars.

We took a chance, two winters ago, in clearing up a lot of new ground. The time was



favorable for the work, and we let our ambition run away with us, lightly taking it for granted that we'd be able to keep the new acreage in cultivation. There was no time to move the stone before spring plowing; we haven't found time for it yet; so that ten acre patch has "gone back" to brush. The clearing will have to be done over again before the land can be used. There's a loss of fifty dollars chargeable to bad judgment.

Two years ago we put down a drilled well, fifty feet deep, to furnish water for the stables. When we were setting the pump we dropped the valve and a length of pipe down the tube. We had no grappling tool handy, so we turned to other work till we might get one. That pipe is still down there, waiting, and we're still watering horses and cattle unhandily. In the two years we've lost solid days of time on account of that carelessness; and there's an investment of seventy-five dollars that hasn't done us a speck of good so far. We've grown accustomed now to having that well out of commission. We'll get to it one of these days. It ought to have been attended to right off the reel.

Gates break down, and we think there isn't

time to mend them at once; then before we know it cattle and pigs have strayed into the growing crops. Minutes would have fixed the gates; but now we've lost the labor of hours.

We ought to have had a small blacksmithing shop on the farm long ago; but we've put that off. Trips to town for repairs have cost ten times as much as it would have cost to build and equip the shop; and we could have saved many a tool that has gone into the discard.

It does beat the world how many losses of that sort a farmer can count up when he really puts his mind to it. I've had myself in training this year, making a tour of the place every once in a while and noting holes in our scheme, through which money is getting away from us. It's been mighty good discipline, though I'll own it's disconcerting to find so many things that have been overlooked before.

Some of these things are justified. We haven't had time or money enough for bringing every part of the farm up to good form. Our forty acres of timber, with its abundant water, ought to be well fenced and seeded to grass and clover. We'd make money on that; but we haven't yet been able to attend to it. We ought to improve our water supply in the

pastures we've made, so that we could have full use of every subdivision at any time in the year without extra labor of caring for the stock. Every dollar spent in that way would be a dollar doubled. Then there's that job of foresting the woods forty. That would pay handsomely, beyond all question. But it will take a nice little lump of money to put it through, and I shall have to put in full time with the workers. I haven't been able to do that yet. And so with a score of things that wait to be done before we can call this a thoroughly established farm. I'm not blaming myself because the work of that sort isn't all finished. The losses arising from the delays I can take cheerfully. Sometimes I wish I could go right at it full tilt with an army of men and have everything done at once; but in my saner intervals I'm glad I can't have it that way. There's a lot more satisfaction in working as we've had to work, taking our tasks one at a time and feeling that each task completed stands for a real difficulty mastered. It doesn't do to have things come too easily.

There's another sort of loss I'm not so complacent about. That's the loss that grows out of sheer neglect. If things once done on a



farm aren't kept up by eternal vigilance, all profits may be absorbed in no time. Every farmer is more or less slack in that particular. I'm in the same potful as the rest of them.

Sam won't mind if I say outright that that's the only quarrel I've had with him. He's not a careful manager in details. He's a master hand at a big, tough job afield that would dismay an ordinary man; but he hates to tinker round keeping up the loose ends. That seems to him too much like boy's play. He'd rather tear out a whole string of fence and rebuild it than walk along the line with a hammer and a pocketful of staples, tacking up the wires that have sagged from the posts. He'd rather whirl in and dig a new well than help to fish the lost pipe out of the old one. He'd rather build a new barn than fuss with driving a timely nail to save a partition the colts have kicked loose. You can't find fault with him for that disposition. I'd rather have him fit for big things than little ones. Just the same, those pesky mickles make a very mountain of a muckle. I've had an extra man on the farm for a month this summer, catching up those straggling ends, and there's another month's work ahead of him.

Every farm in the country hereabouts is rich in the poor fruits of such neglect. On the best of them all a one-eyed man could find fifty ragged signs of inattention to details. Have you ever seen a farm anywhere that showed none of them? I haven't.

The root of the trouble seems to be that there isn't any standard in the mind of the farmer for thrift in such things. With most of us thrift is nothing but an abstract notion and not a clear rule of action. None of us is able to say for sure that he's practicing real thrift in the care of his acres or in any part of his work—that he can't improve upon his methods while using no more than his present working capital. We have no model to go by, even in our mind's eye.

I've set out to change that this year. I'm fixing up a model patch right in the heart of the farm that will serve for our guidance. I believe the plan will work.

This patch has always been a rough looker. It includes about four acres lying between our kitchen garden and the well-tended fields. The land is stony, and there's a rain-washed gutter running through the middle of it. A tight red clay subsoil comes up close to the surface. A



WE WERE MAKING OUR ACRES DO THEIR UTMOST





few of our apple trees were planted at the edge of the patch, but they haven't thrived. Nothing will thrive there till we go at it and give it a thorough overhauling. It's in no worse condition than some of the rest of our land has been; but it's in bad shape. We've let it lie from year to year in all its unsightliness, waiting till there would be time for fixing it up right. It's not an inviting spot for establishing a model farm; but that's what I'm going to do with it.

We're taking off the surface stone first. When that's done, we'll give the tract a dynamiting, cracking and loosening the clay; and then we'll go after the rest of the stone with the big plows, staying with the job till we've got them all, cleaning up as we go. It's likely that we'll have to spend a week on each acre in this first rough preparation; but we'll have the land smooth and fine and the subsoil in perfect condition for the work ahead. In a month from now those four acres will be in better form than any others on the farm. The old wash will be stopped and we'll have a firm foundation for the trial of our idea.

We'll spread upon the tract all the manure and litter we're able to work into the soil, turn-

ing it deep, going over it again and again, making ready against autumn. In November we'll replace the apple trees whose growth has been stunted, adding a few more of choice varieties. The vineyard, too, will be enlarged by half. That will leave two acres for other use, besides what we now have in garden stuff.

On one acre we'll grow our potatoes; the other will be our seed-corn plot. On that acre everything we know of good corn culture will be practiced to the letter and without stint, up to the very limit—selection, testing, preparation of seedbed, planting and care. All through the year every step will be taken as we know it ought to be taken. We'll work for high quality and for maximum yield, too. All that good care can do will be done for every square rod of that acre, and for all the rest of the model patch. What's more, that patch will be kept up in appearance to the dress-parade notch.

The object? Well, partly we want to find out what an acre of our land may be forced to do with all the conditions right; but mostly we want to set the pace on these acres for the whole farm. If by right methods we can make our own demonstration acre give us one hun-



dred and fifty bushels of corn—and that's what I'm bent upon two years hence—then we'll have no excuse for failing to key our larger fields up to the same mark. We'll get good discipline out of that trial tract in holding ourselves up to the best that's in us; and we'll find out what's in the land.

Understand, we're not planning to do anything extravagant or faddish on our model acres. That's to be practical farming, as practical as any we're doing, and carefully guarded against everything that wouldn't be likely to pay on the larger scale of the fields. It's to be a "show" spot; that's true; but we'll be showing ourselves.

Don't you think that's a good idea? I'm stuck on it. If on those four acres we can keep things from going slack—keep all at high tension—I believe the example we set ourselves will be infectious. I think we'll catch it.

I've let this run over till Sunday evening. We've had a fine day at Happy Hollow—just our own folks. It's a long time since a Sunday has passed without somebody coming over the hill from town for a visit. It was too hot today; so we just loafed around the house by ourselves, having a quiet dinner, reading a lit-

tle, talking a little, playing with Peggy and Betty. Haven't I told you about Betty? She's a year and a half old; a gay-hearted wee one, full of rollicky humors. She certainly does keep things stirred up! I don't know how we ever managed to get along without her.

By and by, toward the cool of evening, Laura and I went across the farm to the home of some new neighbors. They came here from Texas, and they're good people. We sat with them and talked for an hour or so, and inevitably the talk turned to matters of the farm. Their place lies beside ours; it's in the rough, as ours was six years ago; their problems are ours right over again. It's not an easy thing they've set out to do.

They know it, too, but they're not looking for the easy thing; if they were, they'd be bad-tempered, peevish, complaining—you know what sour dispositions the easy-thing hunters always have. These people have been on their land for eight months or such a matter, and they act just as if they were having no end of a good time. Presently they began to joke about their misadventures, and then we told some jokes on ourselves, and then they told some more. Listening, you'd have thought

that the work of making a farm out of a piece of wilderness is nothing but a riotous jest.

But the talk carried a serious undernote, for all the surface lightness. Those folks are doing some thinking. There's an unfailing sign we found in them: They've learned something besides discouragement from their mistakes. They've learned some things that might hardly be learned at all save by making mistakes.

They've learned the very duplicate of our own most invaluable lesson, that farming is a waiting game and that the waiting must be done thoroughly. They've learned just what I've been trying to tell you all through this part of the story, that there's no thoroughness in any method of farming which seeks only immediate results and that what the old-timers of this country call long chances are really no chances at all, but the surest of sure-thing bets.

It boils down to this: Wouldn't you rather stake a big, round dollar on a proposition that's certain to give you two for one next year than fritter away a dollar's worth of nickels on a slot-machine gamble with nothing guaranteed but quick action? Apply that to farming, and who's taking chances—the man who plays his



dollar safe and sure, or he who plays the nickels against certain odds?

I'll have to tell you a story by way of illustrating what the nickel-players are likely to come to. It's a story about that same old friend of ours—Jake.

Three years ago Jake tended a little crop of his own, up on the hillside—three or four acres of corn and a patch of turnips for greens. He worked one undersized donkey to a "bull-tongue" plow. Of course he stood no show of making anything at it. That didn't matter, so long as he could come down between whiles and cut wood for us. He kept tirelessly cheerful about it.

Along in the fall he had ten bushels of corn to sell, after he'd put away what he absolutely must keep for feeding his donkey through the winter. The ten bushels brought him five dollars. For a week after that, while his money lasted, we couldn't get him to do a lick of work. Then a traveling circus drifted into town, and early on the morning of circus day Jake appeared with his ax.

"We-uns is aimin' to go to the show this evenin'," he said; "but I lack twenty cents of havin' enough. I want to work for you-uns

twenty cents' worth. I wish you'd please tell me when I've done worked that much, so I won't lose no time gittin' in."

Jake never took any foolish long chances.

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## XII

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I HAVE a poorer opinion of myself than I had a week ago. It's on account of those goats. I set about trying to sell them to a friend the other day. The trial came to nothing; my friend was too wise; but it might have succeeded, and then I'd have been a traitor to friendship. Would you like to think of yourself so?

It came about through a visit to this friend at his farm over south of town. He owns a beautiful place of four hundred acres on the crest of a mountain, overlooking all the earth and the kingdoms thereof. He bought it three years ago, and he got just what the rest of us got who bought around here—a farm in a sad state of neglect. There was a run-down apple orchard of fifty acres. The fields were mostly rough wastes of sassafras bush. If you looked at the spot sharply you saw only unkempt ugliness; you would have to throw your mental eyes a little out of focus to see the great beauty



that was hidden beneath the rough, shabby outer coat. My friend is a man of a sort you meet sometimes—a poet who has never written a verse, an artist who has never made a picture, a prophet whose broad humor won't let his prophecies be taken seriously. It was the poet and artist and prophet in him that led him into buying that great lot of land. But it was the practical man in him that made him set about making the land into a farm.

There's no need to tell all of his story. It's a duplicate of all the others. He's had the strong zest of the homemaker, but that's been frosted over more than once by irritating little troubles. The labor problem has been for him an unending torment. To turn a bunch of hired hands loose on four hundred acres, with only one man to look after them—well, you know about the luck he's had in getting results.

He's been trying to clear the undergrowths from a couple of hundred acres of timber so that the land might be seeded for pasture. He's had a time of it! As we smoked after dinner he told me about it. He wasn't using the speech of the poet; his words were short, choppy, sizzling hot.

That's when I made my break. I'm

ashamed. I wasn't trying to serve him; I guess it was just the rude instinct of self-preservation that spoke.

"Why don't you get some goats to clean up your brush?" I asked. In the back of my head was a dark purpose. I meant to do that man dirt!

That's as far as I got with it, though. He stopped me right there with an emphatic gesture and a loud snort.

"Goats!" he exploded. "I've got 'em! I had a big herd a while ago, and there are twenty-five of 'em left. Mine are the jumpless kind—born with stiff knees, or something, so they can't jump an inch off the ground. Great! Maybe they can't jump; I don't know; but they can certainly bounce, then. If I had money enough, I'd like to try making a pen of some kind that would hold them in—or out. Either way. Goats! And jumpless goats! Why, I've seen mine up with the buzzards in the treetops."

That brought on more talk. We talked about the discouragements—not in a discouraged way, but trying to figure them out.

"Sometimes I'm tempted to quit," my friend said, "or else to compromise and try to be sat-

isfied with what I can get. But I won't do it! Maybe I shan't get what I want, but it won't be because I've slackened up in my ideas. There'll be no compromise!"

That's the way to make a farm. You can see that I shouldn't have helped that man a mite by putting my goats upon him. If a goat isn't a compromise, I don't know what you'd call him.

But here's a point that every farmer must face and get used to. Whatever he's aiming at, if it's anything worth being called a real aim, he'll have to accept compromises and nothing else by way of results. If he gets all of what he's trying for, that simply means he isn't trying hard enough. Purpose must always be set ahead of actual achievement. To be quite content, smugly satisfied, with results is the last and worst compromise of all. That's the slowing down of purpose my friend was talking about.

Look here: How can any farmer afford to be perfectly satisfied with any result, even though it break all records, when he doesn't know how much better he may do? Right on the face of the proposition, there's no limit to possible performance on a bit of good soil.



The only thing to do is just to keep right on going.

One of these times the average corn crop of the United States will be fifty bushels to the acre instead of twenty-six. How do you suppose that will come about? By means of the farmers remaining satisfied with twenty-six? Not much! By means of setting the mark at fifty bushels? No, sir! We'll raise the average to fifty bushels when we all really try with all our might to beat a hundred bushels. Do you see?

Nothing in our crop work at Happy Hollow has given us any reason to be satisfied save that each successive year has marked a step ahead. How many more steps ahead—good, long steps—may we take before we get to the limit of possibilities? You tell me, for I don't know. I'm tolerably sure of this, though: When my work-time is done, the way will still be clear ahead for doing better things than anybody has succeeded in doing in my time.

There's a mocking bird sitting on the very tip-top twig of the big wild cherry tree back of the house, singing at the very tip-top of his voice. He's been at it all this week, from the first glimmer of dawn to the last soft glow of

dusk. I don't believe he's stopped for five minutes together. He acts just exactly like a bird on a tearing spree. He's having a profound debauch of song.

I don't know what it's all about. I wish I did. He and his mate hatched a brood of youngsters last month in the shelter of a wild grapevine that grows over the roof of Peggy's playhouse. The little ones learned to fly and went their way a couple of weeks ago. Maybe this outburst is a riot of thanksgiving that the responsibility is past; or maybe it's a riot of rejoicing over a new brood on the way. The mother bird is keeping mighty quiet and sticking mighty close at home. I'm afraid of bothering her by going to look in the nest. I guess there isn't anyway for it but to wait and see. Whatever the reason, Daddy is having a royal good time, up yonder.

Just at this minute he's mocking the *skreek-skreek* of a block and tackle the men are using in lifting the dirt out of a cistern they're digging. Five minutes ago you'd have thought the yard was full of cawing young crows. He can "Bob-White," too, fit to make a quail ashamed of his own lack of proficiency. Now it's a cardinal, and then a chattering sparrow,

and again the thin, treble tweetering of a warbler. He's right good at everything he tackles. But in the last day or two I've been growing suspicious of him. He's so incredibly clever with his imitations; his repertory is so utterly inexhaustible. I'm beginning to believe that most of the time he isn't mocking at all, as he pretends, but is just romancing—just making it up as he goes along—giving us a few genuine imitations and then sticking in a lot of stuff of his own and trying to make us take it as “something just as good.”

Query: Would that be cheating? Or would it? The question has set me to wondering. There are some folks who, if they could really prove it on him, would feel a sense of disappointment. Since he poses as a mocker, they'd want him to mock and mock and do nothing else. They'd be for denying him the right to any least flicker of originality. Are they right? Or are they cheating themselves in failing to take him as he is and make the best of him?

I shouldn't wonder if we see a lot of our clever planning on the farm go wrong simply because we want everything to bend to our notions and aren't willing to surrender our no-



tions to the great fixed laws. It's so easy in farming to settle into habits of thinking and practice, even though one prides himself that he's a progressive of the progressives. After a while it becomes hard to say what is the real thing and what the counterfeit of good methods.

We've made a few mistakes by taking up what we thought to be advanced methods and persisting in them when we might better have let Nature have her own way. Hers is almost certainly a more deliberate way than ours; but that's most likely to be its chief virtue.

There's the matter of artificial fertilizer, for instance. With a soil so impoverished as ours was, we knew it would be a matter of years to bring it to normal producing power if we stuck to the natural way of returning our crops to the land through stock feeding. It seemed vastly easier and certainly quicker to doctor the soil, giving it at once the elements it lacked and so stimulating it to immediate performance. Soil chemistry, if you get just a smattering of it, seems an imposingly exact science. You get an analysis or what's called a normal soil; then you find out that your own is shy about so much potash, and so much phosphoric

acid, and so much nitrogen, and you buy these things in sacks, all properly balanced, and apply them exactly where the need is indicated.

There's nothing the matter with the theory, as a theory. It needs experience to prove that it has certain weaknesses in practice.

Along at first my garden patch didn't suit me in the quantity or quality of some of the stuff it gave me. I'd been making garden in Nebraska on a black, deep loam that had been heavily enriched with tons and tons of manure to the acre. It had produced according to its strength. The results gotten down here, compared with those of earlier times, were far from satisfactory. My head lettuces looked pale and pindling, and they weren't nearly up to grade on the table. I'd always fancied that it would take a pretty good gardener to beat me at growing head lettuces. In Nebraska I'd had 'em as big as your hat and as solid as croquet balls. The product of the first summer at Happy Hollow turned out of the size of eggs and of the texture of a wad of paper.

There wasn't nitrogen enough in the soil; that was plain. I bought soda nitrate and began to feed my plants as carefully as you'd feed a bottle baby. The result was distressing.

The plants grew, of course; but they grew into tall, lean rods, with just a few drooping leaves scattered up and down. The chickens would pick at them inquiringly and turn away to eat grass. We didn't try to eat them ourselves.

I tried that feeding, too, with others of the vegetables. The tomato vines responded pretty well in vigor of growth, but the fruits were mostly small and misshapen. The peas came along tolerably, but they weren't as good as we'd been used to. We had used the last winter's wood ashes freely on this plot, along with the nitrate; but our stuff was a long way from being up to the mark.

The trouble was that our soil was dead, as dead as though we'd brought it from the bottom of a well. The vitality had been sapped out of it. No normal, living process was going on beneath the surface. Decay of old life had stopped because there was no old life there to decay—and decay must go hand in hand with life. I might almost as well have applied my soda nitrate upon a bed of brickdust, expecting it to produce good garden truck.

The use of chemical fertilizer in such a case is just an attempt to make a short cut on Nature. Instead of getting a successful short



cut, we got a short circuit and a "burn-out." I had to go back to first principles and begin to make a real soil. That meant putting organic matter into it—manure, and weed-stalks, and every sort of litter that would rot. My garden rows now don't feel underfoot like stone pavement. The ground is so mellow that in the driest time you might kick into it to your shoe-tops. Now it's in form so we may get the benefits of any commercial fertilizer that's applied. In the beginning the use of chemicals was altogether unprofitable. I'm not sure but that it did actual harm. As it is now, that soil turns out vegetables equal to any grown anywhere.

In many ways we have had that hint given us at our work—the hint that in order to succeed at farming we must be content to take Nature as we find her and make the best of her and not defeat ourselves by trying to defeat her unalterable ends. I think we've learned the lesson now. Whenever anything is to be undertaken nowadays that's a departure from old usage, I like to try first of all to find out how Nature is likely to feel about it—whether it's consistent with what I know of her own behavior, or whether it would work contrariwise. There are men through the

country here who are bolder. Some seem bold enough to try growing bananas or edible seaweed on these rocky Ozark hillsides. Frankly, I'm growing more timid rather than bolder about radical innovations. A reasonable caution has its place in progress, hasn't it?

Speaking of progress, we're getting some of it in the Fayetteville country this year. We've fussed about the delays; but we'll have to stop fussing pretty soon and take a fresh grip on things if we don't want to be known among the neighbors as hard-shelled old-timers.

A rural life conference was held at the state university in June. In point of attendance it's said to have beaten any other conference of the sort in the United States. It was a whizzer! Day after day, right in the middle of summer, the farmers gathered for discussion of their living problems. They weren't content merely to sit and listen to a lot of speech-making by distinguished visitors. They were interested enough to take part in some high-strung disagreements and arguments among themselves about this, that and the other. That's a mighty good sign. They talked of good roads, and improvement of rural schools, and better marketing of farm products, and

farm credit and such-like as if they were deeply interested. The conference has left a clean, wholesome after-taste. It's bound to show some of the results we've been hankering for. The project was undertaken rather doubtfully; its backers were afraid that folks wouldn't care enough about it to turn out more than a handful of listless listeners. The farmers fooled them.

It isn't only in the first stage of conference that the farmers are getting action hereabouts. We have something for a sign at our own doors. They're making a real road out of the old Huntsville trail.

Do you remember what I told you about how that trail struck us when we first drove over it, six years ago, coming to look at the farm? It stood for one of the ancient ways of travel; it was rough and unkempt; picturesque enough, but not very serviceable. It was impossible to haul a real load over it.

To be sure, a part of the county road tax was spent upon it once in a while, in that queer way which used to be called "improvement." You know what that amounted to. The road would merely be mussed up a little. It was the custom for the farmers to gather on the



road in summer, after crops were "laid by," bring along their teams and their dinners and spend a day or two working out their taxes. Mostly those days were only occasions for meeting and swapping neighborhood gossip. One of the workers would be chosen as "boss," and by fits and starts the crew would plow out a ditch or two, throw some rough stone into the worst of the chug-holes, and leave it next to impassable till the next rain would wash it down again. It was a good old style, and good for neighborliness, but it didn't help the roads.

For the last month a big modern grading machine has been at work on that old road, a gang of huge plows and scrapers pulled by gasoline power and managed by a man who knows what a real road is and how to make one. He's one of the newcomer-farmers of the district. The road has been changed till its own mother wouldn't know it. Deep ditches have been run along the sides, run on such lines that they'll carry off the water in a heavy rain instead of letting it collect in puddles and boggy places. The earth from the ditches has been thrown up and rounded off in the center; it's been scraped and rolled, and scraped and rolled again. Extra crews were kept at work

picking up and throwing out the stone. The job took about a week to the mile, but when it was finished it looked as if it had been newly barbered and manicured. We can drive over the Huntsville trail now with our eyes shut; and next winter if a farmer wants to go to town from out here all he'll need to do will be to hitch up and go. Lots of times in past winters we've stayed at home rather than mire down on the way in.

There's something doing, too, in the country school district just north of Happy Hollow. Until lately that has been a quiet country settlement whose people went about their affairs pretty much in the old way, taking things as they came, doing no agitating, not getting ahead very fast. Their life was largely a life of traditions.

A District Improvement Club has been organized, its members meeting week after week to talk over living problems of farm life. Sometimes they've had as many as a hundred and fifty farm-folks at their gatherings. They've had great good out of it, and the interest is growing instead of flagging. Contrast that with conditions in our own district six years ago, when an ungraded school was

"kept" for three months in the winter, with a teacher paid \$25 a month. There was talk of discontinuing it altogether as a needless expense, for on some days only two or three pupils would show up.

What do you suppose the farmers are discussing in the new Improvement Club up north? Good roads, of course, and ways and means for doing some necessary things; but just now the central idea is vocational training in the country schools! The subject is being discussed, too, not merely fooled with. Before we know it these schools will be reorganized for real service.

Besides these more pretentious undertakings there are many neighborhood clubs scattered round, some of them not formally organized but meeting in the farmers' homes in the evenings or on a Sunday afternoon. The truth of it is that sentiment for better conditions is sort of seething around Fayetteville.

What has brought the change to pass? The weight of opinion of the newcomers? Well, that has helped, of course. Some of these newcomers have brought with them a lot of fresh, vigorous ideas and an unbounded enthusiasm. It's probably true that if the old life hadn't



been stirred up by the immigration of the last few years these changes would have waited for years. A stirring up was badly needed.

But, when all due credit has been given the newcomers, there's a lot left over for the folks on the ground. There was nothing the matter with them save that they had lacked just the right impulse to get things a-going. It would have been impossible for the strangers to make actual headway with their undertakings against any real antagonism from a majority of the older settlers. Some of these of course have stoutly opposed the new program; others have been offish outwardly at first till they could find out what was what, but at heart they weren't set against better conditions. Most of them have desired better conditions as ardently as anybody could; but long usage in any country hardens into habit, and the habit isn't easily broken till something comes along from outside to interrupt it. It simply hadn't occurred to these people that they might actually do the things they wanted done. They didn't quite know how to go about it.

That's the part the strangers have played, once the older settlers got to know them and found that they were to be trusted as friends

and neighbors. Enthusiasm, too, was a little lacking—enthusiasm and not desire.

Enthusiasm! There's a fine, strong word, standing for a great power in this little old life of ours, whether in town or country. The more I think of it, the more I'm persuaded that the flow of youth from the farms to the towns in recent years has had its source, not in discontent with country hardships, not in any morbid desire for excitement, but for the most part in a limitless enthusiasm which sought room for expression according to its strength.

Now the enthusiasm is coming back to the farms; for under the new order it can have a better chance on the farms than of old. Farm life has become a great life, and it will be greater still beyond compare in the years ahead.

That won't be altogether on account of outward changes in farm conditions. Scientific methods in crop production, scientific farm management, improved marketing facilities—all such things are agencies, but they'd be next to valueless without the fire of human enthusiasm to give them life and meaning.

That's what we're getting on the farms in these days.

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### XIII

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DID anybody ever entice you into trying to figure yourself rich at the chicken business? If not, then you're the hundredth man. Even if you aren't thinking seriously of going into chickens, you really ought to try that figuring sometime, just for the education you'll get out of it.

Come on, now; get out paper and pencil. You won't need much paper. The back of an old envelope will do, if you crowd the lines up a little. It isn't at all a long job.

You begin with just one hen. That's all you'll need for a starter. Most likely your ideas are more liberal than that. Perhaps that sort of a beginning strikes you as too trifling and slow. But just wait till you see what that one hen will do for you. She's certainly going to surprise you.

Of course, since the beginning is so modest, she'd better be a good hen—one of the two hundred-egg kind you read about. She'll be



easy to find. Lots of poultrymen advertise that kind of stock for sale. And she won't cost much. You'll be able to find a corking good hen and a rooster from a pedigreed, strong-laying strain—as good birds as any one need have as a foundation for a commercial poultry business—for a ten-dollar bill. You may find cheaper stuff if you wish; but that's cheap enough.

All right. You start with your one hen, and she starts laying. If she lives up to her family standard, she'll lay you two hundred eggs in the first year. Now you set those eggs. This high-grade bird can't hatch them herself, for that would interfere with her laying operations; and you can't manage a one-hen egg output very well with an incubator. That needn't bother you, though. You can get a few scrub barnyard hens to do the first year's hatching and brooding. When that season's work is done, you can sell the scrubs off and begin with incubators next year.

With two hundred eggs, theoretically you ought to have two hundred chickens. But not all the eggs will hatch; and then besides there'll be some losses of young chicks by accident and disease. It doesn't do to expect too

much. So suppose you get only one hundred chicks that will live through to maturity. That's fair enough, isn't it?

Probably half of those chickens will be roosters; so you'll have fifty hens for starting your second year's work. That's fifty for one. With that rate of increase you'll come to the beginning of your third year with 2,500 hens. You'll have disposed of the cockerels at the end of last season, of course, when they weighed say an average of six pounds apiece—15,000 pounds. At ten cents a pound that would give you \$1,500. Income has begun already, you see!

That same fifty-fold increase will give you 125,000 hens at the end of your third season. We're not counting the old hens, you notice; we'll leave them out of the reckoning entirely, so as not to complicate the figures. By the same token, you'll have fifty times as many cockerels this year as last, and fifty times as much money for them. That's \$75,000! That's only three years from the start! And from just one hen, mind you! And you have 125,000 hens left for your fourth year's breeding.

At the end of the fourth year you'll have

6,250,000 hens and an income of \$3,750,000 from the sale of cockerels; and your fifth year will give you 312,500,000 hens and an income from the cockerels of \$187,500,000. Still leaving all old stock out of account, you see! We throw them in for good measure, so nobody may charge us with being too visionary.

From one hen, bought only five years ago! Aren't you glad now that you didn't start with more? If you'd started with a couple of dozen, perhaps the increase would be more than you could manage. Yes, one hen is enough for a beginning, if she's a hen of the right kind.

No doubt you'll want to stop at the limit of your fifth year's flock of 312,500,000 hens. That's as many hens as you'll feel like caring for. In fact, you'll have to stop there; for if you had a fifty-fold increase in your sixth year you'd have 15,625,000,000 hens. You see where the trouble would start then. If you fed each hen only a bushel of grain in a year, your flock would eat up about four times as much wheat and corn and oats and other grains as all the farms of the United States produce. That would be awkward. Never mind. Suppose you do have to stop there and just main-



tain what you've got; your income will be more than you can possibly spend, provided you continue to give some of your time to a personal attention to the business. Indeed, I shouldn't wonder if you'd be willing to retire pretty soon—say by the end of your tenth year, and give yourself up to a good time for the rest of your days.

Is that absurd? Where's the absurdity? It's a matter of plain, simple arithmetic. There are the figures, truth-telling, confidence-compelling. Right on its face, that proposition is a lot more reasonable than some others I've read in advertising addressed to back-to-the-landers.

No, there's no flaw at all in the logic of this calculation—until you run it out to its logical conclusion. Then it's absurd enough to satisfy anybody.

What makes it hard to understand is the fact that lots and lots of people—hundreds and thousands of them—have actually started chicken-raising with one hen as a beginning and have actually come to the beginning of their second year with fifty hens as increase. But nobody on earth, since the beginning of chicken-raising, has ever carried the matter

through at that rate for five years, nor four, nor three. Maybe somebody has done it for two years, but I've never heard of him; have you? Be careful, now! Did you ever know of a flock of 2,500 hens that had been bred and reared in two years' time from one original mother? You'll have to show me!

What's the answer? If that program is practicable for one year, why isn't it just as practicable for two years, or for three? We came to Happy Hollow with two dozen or more hens six years ago—fine, strong stock, as good as the best. Why isn't the Fayetteville country literally overrun by their increase? How does it happen that there isn't some time, somewhere, a freak exhibition of the possibilities of that indisputable capacity for increase? If it is theoretically possible in six years for one little old hen to produce 15,625,000,000 female descendants, wouldn't you think that all the hens in the country, working all together for century after century, might arrive at something like that grand total after a while?

Now that we're started on the arithmetic of it and are talking about logical conclusions, we

might as well let out a few notches more, just for fun.

If the increase of that one solitary hen were continued at that rate for ten years, the end of the tenth season would give us 488,281,250,-000,000,000 hens, not to say a word about the roosters. That would be about 500,000,000 hens apiece for every man, woman and child in the United States. And yet there are folks who talk gloomily about an early impending shortage of foodstuffs in the world! Why, every one of us would have to eat 57,077 hens an hour for every blessed hour, day and night, through the whole year in order to eat up his share. We couldn't do it. Besides, what should we do with those roosters? And as for the eggs——

Shucks! What's the use of acting the fool like this? Let's talk sense. You may not think it, but I had a sensible idea in the back of my head when I started this foolishness.

If you've followed me carefully, perhaps I needn't say that the chicken business isn't what it's cracked up to be—that the practice doesn't come out at all like the theory. Every one who has tried it has found that out. It seems somehow inevitable that everybody whose thoughts



turn toward the land for a livelihood gets to thinking about chickens as affording the safest, surest and quickest route to success. Yet it isn't often that you hear of anybody making a fortune out of chickens, nor even a decent living. There must be a screw loose somewhere.

It isn't hard to find—in practice. The factor that's the most fascinating of all, when you're working with paper and pencil, is the very factor that defeats you when you get to working with hens. A flock of poultry does in fact increase at an almost unbelievable ratio; the increase is so rapid that the poultryman, if he's just an unskilled amateur, can't possibly keep up with it. It overwhelms him, throws him into hopeless confusion; and before he's able to bring order out of the chaos he finds himself involved in losses he couldn't foresee and can't afford to bear. So, plumb discouraged, he sells out and quits. I dare say that's been the history of ninety-nine out of every hundred ventures in commercial poultry raising.

The facts are that a farm flock of forty or fifty good hens or thereabouts, if given good farm care and kept down to that number, is usually highly profitable. A flock of a thou-

sand good hens under good management by a skilled poultryman who will give the necessary time to it has been proved profitable; and of course that number may be increased with an increase of facilities for care. But between the small flock for farm use and the commercial flock of a thousand birds lies a gap that isn't often crossed. Somewhere between the two extremes every adventurer almost certainly comes to a point where for a time losses must overbalance income. Unless he's uncannily long-headed, or unless he can command the help of some one who's been through it and knows, he'll be quite unable to see through the maze of confusion.

We had a fine flock when we came to Happy Hollow. That small flock had always paid handsomely. We knew how to handle the birds, how to feed for results, how to select for breeding, and all the intimate details of successful care. We hadn't tried to build up a large commercial flock at home in Nebraska simply because we hadn't room enough. But we had had it in our minds for years as a most fetching possibility. When we found ourselves actually owning a big farm, that vision quickened. Discounting and discounting again

THIS WAS OUR DREAM COME TRUE







for every possible emergency, and then cutting the resulting figures in two and dividing again by half, we couldn't for the life of us find any good reason why there shouldn't be good money in commercial poultry farming. We went at it in our second year.

We didn't plunge. We didn't try to force the pace at all at the beginning. The best of our stock was used for the breeding pens, and our eggs were strongly fertile. We had a one hundred and forty-egg incubator, and this was filled a second time so soon as the first hatch was off. As our supply of good eggs was larger than the incubator's capacity, we supplemented its work by setting hens on good clutches at the same time, so that the chicks might be brooded and tended all together.

Our hatches were excellent, and our losses after hatching were very small. Of course the year's work didn't show anything like a fifty-fold increase in the number of hens used in breeding, but the increase was very satisfactory. After a rigid culling out, we went into the next year with about two hundred hens fit for use in the pens. We didn't use all of them, but selected again, taking only the best; and again the hatches were fine. By mid-

summer our yards held about five hundred hens and growing pullets. There had been no accidents worth mentioning, and the percentage of loss had been very small. So far as increase was concerned, we had every reason to be satisfied. Another year would easily give us a flock of a thousand hens. From that point almost anybody would have read his title clear—on paper.

But we stopped with the five hundred and then began to cut down the number till we had got back to a flock just about large enough for our own table needs. We've stayed at that point since. We had found out that we were up against a big undertaking. If we had stayed with it for another year we couldn't by any chance have missed losing.

The solemn truth is that hatching chickens is merely a detail of the chicken business. We had no trouble at all with that part of it, nor with bringing the hatches through to maturity. The difficulty was quite aside from that.

It seems inexcusable, looking back over it; but we hadn't figured on the very obvious fact that it must take a lot of time to give proper care to a thousand hens. A flock of two or three dozen made no great demand; that was



just one of the morning and evening chores, and soon over with. While the hatches were small, the brooders might be kept in the house-yard, right under our eyes, where they could have continual oversight without making us realize that we were giving much time to them. The hen houses we had built at the beginning were roomy and comfortable enough for sheltering several times as many as we started with, and the yards we had first enclosed were equally roomy. Feeding cost had never been a considerable item, either, when we had only the domestic flock; table scraps and kitchen refuse went a long way toward disposing of that.

During our five hundred-hen summer we discovered the difference. We found that a flock of that size could hardly be made to pay because it wasn't large enough to justify either of us in giving it the undivided time and attention it must have if it were to prove a success. Feeding, watering and tending became vastly more than a light chore which might be delegated to the children. With a barnyard flock running around, the loss of a hen or two now and then hadn't seemed to amount to much, because we hadn't been keeping,

accounts of profits and losses; but in the course of a year that unconsidered leak might easily amount to twenty-five per cent. of all we had. When we essayed to put the business on a commercial footing, and on a much magnified scale, plainly those losses had to be looked after closely. They couldn't be guarded against save by staying right on the job, watching for disease, keeping up the yards, scoring and sorting out the likeliest breeders, keeping individual records of performance. There was a lot to be learned before we would be able to do this well.

We should have to work hard for at least two years without any net income, while we were getting the business firmly on its feet. Had we been situated close to a good consuming market for our surplus eggs and broilers, and able to reach consumers directly, the case would have been somewhat better; but Fayetteville, like every other country town I've ever known anything about, isn't a profitable market for a little jag of farm surplus. Too many farmers are going in every day with little jags of something or other, accepting whatever the middlemen are offering. Our surplus wasn't yet great enough so that we

could afford to seek a direct and a better market, by advertising or otherwise. Had we had plenty of working capital it would have been good business to set about making direct connections, looking to the years to come; but that would have absorbed at least as much as our surplus would bring us. There must be nothing haphazard in the marketing, if profits were to be realized. That preparation would have taken a great deal of time, too; and more time would have to be spent in keeping records, in studying good methods, and generally in putting the business on a business basis. Yes, one of us would have to give all his time to the hens for two years without any net profit.

And a considerable working capital was demanded for other things than advertising and making our market. We hadn't forecast how large an investment we should be called upon to make in feed. Though our small farm flock had cost next to nothing in that way, we should have to feed grain worth \$500 or more in maturing our five hundred pullets and carrying them over to the next season. We hadn't so much money right then that we felt was available for that use.

And there was the matter of housing. In



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getting ready for a thousand hens, we should have to increase our housing capacity many fold to accommodate the breeders and the broiler hatches. That would call for another \$500 at least.

Plainly, instead of our original small yard we should have to devote at least twenty acres to our flock for yards and range; and besides, with a thousand hens to be fed and their hatches to be prepared for market, all the rest of the farm would have to be given up to the production of chicken feed. The twenty acres of range and yards would have to be fenced and cross-fenced, and the business would call for an investment in incubators and brooders and other equipment. Then, as in any other business whose management was fit to be called intelligent, we ought to have a moderate cash capital for operation. Without it we should be running into unforeseen snags.

So, you see, if we were going into chicken-raising on a commercial scale and on a safe basis that would justify us in expecting good profits, we must make a very substantial investment. In addition to what we had in the land, we should need \$3,000 or \$3,500—maybe more—to get the business a-going. We hadn't

so much money to give to it; and so we backed down while the backing was good.

Have we abandoned the chicken idea? We have not. We got into it far enough to see clearly that with an adequate investment and right attention commercial poultry-raising might be made to pay well, perhaps better than anything else we might undertake on an equal capital and with an equal use of time. Next year we shall go into it again, and this time we'll go to stay. With our earlier experience to help us, letting us understand the strong and the weak points in the proposition, we can't see failure in it.

We shall start moderately, it's true; but our start won't be made with a dozen hens and a rooster. We shall contrive to skip over that disheartening half-way-between year of no profits. We don't want to spend another year in taking care of four or five hundred hens when we can see that that is a needless loss of time and patience and money. We shall begin next time with breeding flocks of one hundred hens so we may jump over the troublesome time and come at once in our second year to a commercial flock of 1,000 or 1,200. Then we'll have something.

We'll go into it with money enough in hand to see us through, so we may put some "pep" into the marketing of our stuff; and from that foundation we shall build as large a business as we are able to take care of.

I've been running on quite a bit about chickens. I've done it on purpose, because I have never seen just this statement of the matter in print, and because a fair understanding may save other folks many a disappointment.

Here's the way it stands, as we see it: If you're figuring on the chicken business, don't waste time in figuring over the fabulous rate of increase that's theoretically possible. If you'll make right provision for it, increase will come fast enough. That will be the least of your frets. If you don't make right provision, well in advance of the actual increase, you'll be doomed to failure.

Figure carefully on practical ways and means, and not at all on the fairy-story end of things. Then you'll be reasonably certain to win.

A couple of years ago I was down South, riding through an isolated farming district that lay far from railway. One day I stopped for dinner at a farmhouse, and of course we talked



farming over the meal. The farmer's family was living in most uncommon comfort; the farm produced just about everything that was needed. Remoteness from market towns rather compelled that. There was a fine garden, plenty of fruit, turkeys, geese, ducks, hens, pigs, cows and mules, well fed and sleek.

Out beside the house was a little patch of Spanish peanuts, half the size of a small town lot. The farmer told me the nuts would be used in fattening the pigs he would have for his own meat supply.

"How many pigs will that patch fatten?" I asked.

"Oh," he said easily, "them'll fat up a right smart of hawgs."

"Have you any idea how many pounds of pork a patch like that will make?" I persisted.

"Oh," he said, "it'll make quite a consid'ble meat."

But I was after information. "See here," I said: "Suppose you had forty acres in a crop of peanuts like that, how many hogs could you carry on the crop?"

The question seemed to paralyze him for a minute. "Fohty acres?" he said. "Fohty acres! In peanuts? Why, man, dear! Fohty

acres in peanuts would fat all the hawgs they is in the world!"

That's something of the uncalculating state of mind in which many of us approach the chicken business. It takes so little to feed one hen! If she's put to it she can rustle a living for herself, without a cent of cost. Well, just multiply that trifle a thousand times, and there you are! Doesn't it sound easy? Not once in a hundred times is any real thought given to the business end.

I should say that that easy spirit is accountable for nine-tenths of the failures met by townsmen who go at farming. They have such a supreme confidence in Nature's vast generosity! They can't find any good reason why Nature should be stingy. A patch of ground, a few seeds, a hoe—and then fat abundance: That's the usual mental formula.

But that won't work. It's ridiculous to expect success to blow in upon a chance wind. Whether in dairying, or seed-breeding, or meat production, or chicken raising, or any other branch of farm industry, success simply will not come to reward free and easy, hit or miss methods.

We've had some of that to learn at Happy

Hollow, and the learning hasn't been altogether easy. Sometimes, when things are going right, there comes over us a sense of hearty well-being that prompts us to open our hands and relax our minds. Maybe you know the feeling—a sort of assurance that Providence must certainly be helping to take care of you, and that you needn't worry. Those are the times when disaster is most likely to get in its work.

A banker doesn't grow genially lax and begin to make careless loans just because he's had a prosperous year. If he's a good banker, he'll take a hunch from that prosperity, tighten the lines, buckle his mind to his work, and so make himself a better business man than before.

Well, that's farming, too. That's just the temper the farmer needs to cultivate with all the genius he has. Successful farming is successful business—that's all.



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## XIV

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DOES our farming pay? It's hard for us to put sentiment aside in considering the question. When we talk things over between ourselves, Laura and I, sentiment is never left out; for to us that is the substance of what we're doing. It's no more than fair to you, though, that we should get right down to hard, practical bedrock for a while and "talk turkey." The veriest sentimentalist on earth must have something to eat now and then. Maybe having three square meals a day makes him all the better sentimentalist. Our home at Happy Hollow would be a queer sort of place if the storerooms and pantries and cellars were empty. It's practical farming that keeps them full.

So let's try to stick to the very practical question of the farm and what it's giving us that's good to eat and fit to wear and meant for tangible enjoyment. Sooner or later we must come down to that; for if the farm isn't able

to feed us and clothe us and make us comfortable, then there would be no particular use in all this writing about it. If Happy Hollow isn't paying its way, then it's just a luxury such as anybody might enjoy if he had the price, and I'd be deluding you by trying to make it appear that it's anything else. The fact that we've made a delightful home of it wouldn't be enough to distinguish it; for there are many happy homes. Yes, we must sum up the matter of farming for a living and the returns in dollars and cents.

The farm is giving us a good living. That would better be said plainly and in few words. Any day in the year we can set our table abundantly with what our own land has produced. Always there is plenty for our own needs and for the pleasure of our friends. No prince of the blood could fare better, for we have just what we want to make us perfectly satisfied. What we have is all so good that it couldn't be any better. It comes to our table from within arm's reach of our own doors, and everything is of the best of its kind.

I don't know how to express that by writing a dollar mark with a row of figures after it. If we were buying in the markets what we get

from our garden and vineyard, from our pastures and dairy-barn and hen yards for our own table, we'd have to pay \$1,000 or \$1,200 a year for it. It comes so easily and so naturally, just when we want it, a basketful or a pailful or an armful, that we're very apt to overlook its value; but it amounts to a good snug sum in the course of a year. Besides, there's always a surplus. Some of this surplus we sell. Maybe if we were as thrifty as we ought to be we'd sell it all. But it's a pleasure to have some of it to give away, to be able to send a basket of asparagus or grapes, or a roll of sweet butter, or a side of sugar-cured bacon to somebody we've taken a shine to. We can't keep track of that, because it has no equivalent in coin. It won't do to call that a mere indulgence. Friendship isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. We had no such way of showing friendliness when we lived in town. If you're able to write that out in figures, you have me beaten.

However you compute it, with every charge made against it that the greatest stickler of an accountant could devise, the cost of doing all this is so little that it's never felt. The return is great. There is just no chance for a dispute



as to whether that part of our farming pays and pays well. A small corner of the farm, and a few acres of uncultivated land used as pasture, supply our table. We're living more comfortably than we ever lived before.

That might not happen so for everybody. In all probability it wouldn't happen so if the householder were not something of a manager. The difference between low cost and high cost, in furnishing the farm table, lies altogether in management. When there's work to be done in the garden, we plan always to have it done at a time when the work horses are idle for an hour or so and when we can squeeze in the labor of one of the hands who would otherwise be hanging on the side-lines. In the course of a season we cut out considerable waste of time in that way. The saving amounts to a great deal. No matter how carefully the farmer plans, he'll be bound to have some gaps of time in his heavy field work now and then; gaps of hours that run into days.

Maybe the cultivator has been at work in the morning on the new-ground corn, with an extra hand following the machine with a grubbing-hoe, cutting out the loosened roots of the old growths. And maybe there's an interval

of an hour or so after dinner while the machine is being overhauled or a broken strap of the harness mended. The extra hand would like it first-rate if he might spend that hour squatting on his heels in the shade, dozing. The loss in his wages for that hour wouldn't be much—only ten or fifteen cents; but we don't like loafing in the middle of a summer day. I like to watch for those chances. If I can get the idler to hitch a mule to a garden tool and clean out a few rows of potatoes, or run through the sweet corn patch, or attend to some other little job like that, it sets us definitely ahead. It isn't often in summer that we'd like to have a man and team spend a whole day straight on the garden while the fields wait. If the garden work of midsummer isn't done in odd hours, it's very likely to be neglected altogether. Time after time those short catch-as-catch-can jobs have "made" a potato crop for us or saved some other crop in the garden from ruin.

So you'll understand what I mean in saying that the actual cost of getting our own stuff to our own table is almost nothing. If we failed to keep an eye on these small turns and tricks—as most farmers do fail—the cost might be multiplied many times over. But for that sav-

ing feature of management, in all probability our verdict as to the wisdom of kitchen-gardening on the farm would be very unlike our feeling of to-day. A neglected garden is hardly better than none; yet care ought not be given it regardless of cost. With that in mind we've kept our truck patches clustered close about the barn and stable, so they're handy to get at with tools and beasts, and so it's always possible to make good use of a chance load of manure which might go to waste if we waited to haul it to a far field.

The dairy barn, too, is a constant invitation to the study of many little economies whose sum is large. There's the matter of late summer and early fall pasture, for instance. In most parts of the South pasture for the cows becomes a problem in July, August and September, which is our hot, dry season. Most southern farmers are able to keep up milk yield in those months only by a free use of mill feeds at high cost. The cost is often so great as to absorb all profits; so it's not uncommon to see the cows prematurely dried in summer and turned out to pick a bare living on such weeds and roughage as they're able to find for themselves. Then through the fall and winter



there's often no milk or butter on the farmhouse tables.

That looks like poor business, doesn't it? With a little planning all expensive summer feeding may be done away with. Even if the farmer isn't able to afford a summer silo he may save himself by a bit of contriving.

It happens that we have at Happy Hollow in this midsummer quite a likely bunch of young cows and heifers and lately weaned calves. Up to this time there has been plenty of good grass and clover pasture, but in another week or ten days we shall have to think about other feed. There are more animals in the lot than we need for farm use. Most farmers in this fix would sell off the surplus; indeed, that's just what the neighbors are doing. The desire to sell has struck them all at once, so that the speculators are able to beat down prices several notches below real values. If we can carry our animals over the next month or six weeks cheaply and have some good milk animals to offer when the fall rains start and the fall pastures freshen it will mean a good many dollars to us.

We prepared for this emergency a month ago, making a thick sowing of amber sorghum

after oats harvest on a couple of acres lying just over the fence from the barn lots, timing the sowing so we would have the cane ready to feed by mid-July. The land was heavily manured, and with only a month's growth the sorghum is now shoulder-high, rank as a tropical jungle. If it were cut now it would give us five or six tons of cured hay to the acre; cut and fed green and fresh it will carry our cattle abundantly till the first frosts come. The value of the manure we get will much more than pay the cost of preparing and seeding the land, so we get the feeding value of the crop for nothing but the little labor of throwing it over the fence.

That cane crop as it stands is a living proof of the value of manure applied to these worn soils. The dressing was applied heavily while our supply lasted; but the supply gave out before the whole of the patch was covered. You can see the difference with both eyes tied behind you. Only one good rain has fallen since the seeding was done. The dressed part of the land is to-day mellow and moist; the cane standing there is rich, thick-stemmed, dark-leaved and drips juice when it's cut. The strip through the middle of the field that had no

manuring is baked hard, and the cane there is only shoe-top high, the leaves saffron-hued, the stems no thicker than lead pencils and appearing just about as succulent as an old toothbrush. With every condition in its favor for the rest of the season it will give no more than a ton of hay to the acre; probably the yield will be only half a ton.

On one of our oats fields there is some stone left which we want to haul off this summer; so we didn't follow the oats with peas as on the rest of the small grain land. Those five or six acres promised to lie fallow for the remainder of the year; but now there's a fine volunteer crop of crabgrass and Japanese clover coming on. We're running a line of fence across one side, to cut the patch off from the cornfields—and there's excellent pasturage for the horses, enough to carry them well till the beginning of winter.

All this means of course that the permanent pastures will be left to restore themselves for late fall use. They'll be greatly improved by the rest, and the stock will thrive all the better for the change. The ultimate cost of doing these things is just the cost of a couple of days labor; the profits can't be exactly estimated,



but they'll run up in one way and another to many dollars. Best of all, our pigs will be thriving on a part of that sorghum for next winter's meat, and for the rest of the year our milk and cream and butter will cost us nothing but the labor of caring for the animals while most of our farmer neighbors are going without.

You can see that there's nothing extraordinary in any of this. We've had no circumstances in our favor save as we've taken hold and molded them to our needs. There isn't a farm in the country on which this sort of management might not be followed—just a careful, timely stroke that's thought out long enough beforehand to give it full value. As a matter of fact, though, I don't know of one farm around Happy Hollow that's having such management. I haven't seen another farm in the neighborhood that has provided even a little forage-patch.

That isn't a showy sort of management. Even a practical farmer would be apt to underestimate its worth if he had never tried the stop-gap system in his own work. He'd deceive himself by figuring the money value of the small batches of stuff grown in that way

instead of the value of the service they render—which of course is the true value on the farm. The cash-crop idea is all right till it becomes an obsession; but too close devotion to it leads many a farmer to miss many an opportunity for getting ahead. The measure of value of that sorghum patch isn't at all the price we might get for the hay if we cut and cured and sold it in the market, but rather what it will save us by conserving our pastures and making it unnecessary for us to sacrifice valuable stock.

You'll see how difficult it is to write down the profits of such operations in dollars and cents. What's it worth in dollars and cents to have brimming pailfuls of rich fresh milk, night and morning, all through July and August and September, just at the time of year when it's most needed for health's sake? I can't cipher it out. There are many degrees of living, and none is too good if it insures health and comfort. The best doesn't often depend upon the amount of money spent in getting it, but far oftener upon a little good care.

A few days ago I visited a farmhouse down the road and saw an eight-months-old baby sitting on the floor sucking hungrily at a chunk

of pork. There was no milk for it, because the cow had been sold, because there wasn't anything to feed it, because the farmer hadn't planned by a couple of hours' work in June to meet this unfailing midsummer condition. The farmer's wife said the baby was "right puny, this hot weather," and it looked the part.

Well, anyway, to get back to the practical question, I know perfectly well that this stop-gap method of doing things in garden and barn and feed-lot is enabling us to live and to live well on no money outlay at all. You may say if you like that that's contrary to all reason; but it's true. True things needn't necessarily gee with what we think is reasonable. Nothing seems reasonable till we've grown more or less accustomed to it. But there's the fact. Our table is supplied through careful little savings in time which, but for this practice, must be sheer wastes. We have no loafing hours in our work days. If field work stops for any reason at any time, we make it a point always to find something to do that will make our living conditions better and help to keep our living costs at zero. Lean back in your chair for a minute now and see if that proposition doesn't clear itself up for you.



That leaves the field work to be talked about—that part of the work which most of us think about when farming is mentioned. Since we're calling this a farm, we ought to be able to account for what the fields are doing. That's fair enough; for running a farm as large as ours doesn't consist merely in supplying the house table. That may be done on only a few acres; but we have a hundred and twenty acres in the farm. If the big end isn't paying, then it's a case of the tail wagging the dog—freak business.

We have sixty acres of the farm well cleaned up and in a fine state of cultivation, besides twenty acres in partly timbered pasture—a pasture with a brook on either side, and the fields between. Ten acres of the sixty is in park, lawn, garden, orchard, house grounds, barnyard and feeding lots. That leaves fifty acres actually devoted to field crops.

From that fifty acres we shall get this year, after deducting enough to pay labor cost, about three hundred bushels of wheat, four hundred of oats, eight hundred of corn, sixty to seventy-five tons of cowpea and sorghum hay, ten or twelve tons of straw, and perhaps twenty tons of corn fodder that will be cut and

stored for feeding. About as much more fodder will be pastured in the fields; and we shall have no end of second-growth peavines for pasturage. Suppose we throw in that pasture part; we'd have to guess at its money value, anyway. Suppose we count only the harvested crops.

Most of the farmers around us have been used to selling so soon as they could manage it after harvest. Usually they need the money; but, if they weren't impelled by necessity to sell, they haven't enough storage room for putting by anything beyond their own farm needs.

If we intended to sell what we've grown, we should hold until December 1 or later when the depression of harvest time is past and recovery of prices is under way. Judging from the past, about December 1 our wheat will be worth in the local markets approximately ninety cents a bushel, our oats forty cents, our corn seventy cents, our hay fifteen dollars a ton, and our straw five or six dollars. There isn't a market price on the corn fodder, as no one hereabouts has made a commodity of it. What is saved is usually fed on the farms. Sometimes it figures in trades between neighbors, but never in the open market.

It's worth as much as the straw, at least—five or six dollars a ton.

We shan't sell our crops in the raw; but if we were to sell we'd realize about \$2,000.

In 1908, the year we bought the farm, the tenant's crop summed up sixty bushels of wheat, thirty bushels of oats, one hundred and twenty bushels of corn, a few small loads of fodder, and no hay. If he had owned the entire crop and had sold on the average prices of December 1, his gross income would have been about \$165, with nothing counted out for labor. And his crop was about on a footing with the crops grown on other farms here that were run as ours was.

So, considering everything, we feel that our farming has paid and that we have succeeded uncommonly well. If future years showed no improvement over this year in point of yields, if we made no further advance in any way, and if there were no income from any other source, we could live in security on our farm. We could indulge no extravagances, but we could get along very comfortably. We'd be well above the poverty level. If we knew distress it wouldn't be the distress of hunger or privation.



We couldn't be satisfied with that, though. We should feel a very positive distress at this point in achievement if we thought we must go no further—not because we need or want more than the farm is now giving us, but because we have just now discovered that real achievement is all ahead of us.

We have set no records in anything we have done. There's the rub. But why shouldn't we? We're carrying no handicap; there's no obstacle in our way; and there's no reason why we must think of stopping where we are, even though we have done better in many ways than we hoped in the beginning. Frankly, this was an adventure. We meant to succeed in it. Never at any time have Laura and I seriously discussed the possibility of failure. I shouldn't wonder if that's the main reason why we haven't failed. Tenacity of temper, with the mind set upon success, and with no alternative of defeat to be considered—that's a good half of accomplishment itself.

We didn't go at our work with any fixed goal, saying to ourselves that when we got to such and such a point we'd be willing to halt and thereafter let well enough alone. Always our talk has been of something ahead, some-

thing better than the best of the past. We're still of that mind. We mean to keep right on, using the past simply as a beginning, and regarding the future as an invitation which must be accepted.

You know how pleasing it is to review a creditable performance and say to yourself over it: "Well, there! I've never done that before! I'm advancing!" I'm trying to think how it would feel to change the form and say: "Well, there! Nobody on earth ever did that before!" Before we're through with our work we want to taste that satisfaction.

For my part, I don't much care what form this achievement may take, if only it's something worth doing. Maybe we'll wind up by growing more corn on an acre of land than has been grown before. That wouldn't be bad. Maybe we'll work out a means of reducing the production cost of one or another of the farm staples. That would be all right with me. Maybe we'll succeed in demonstrating in some new way how far an acre of land may go in furnishing food for us humans. That would be bully! Maybe we'll discover a new wrinkle in the work of restoring vitality to an exhausted soil. That would be going some! Or maybe

our pace-making will be decidedly more modest in its character. I shan't kick about that. Whatever it may be, we're bent upon doing something here at Happy Hollow that will advance the business of farming and so make it easier for folks to live.

Is that a practical aim for a farmer? Or is it merely a sentimental notion? I don't care what you call it. We're going to do it. Only when that is done shall we be able to feel that our adventure has wholly and happily justified itself.

Why shouldn't we do it? Goodness knows there are plenty of ways open for breaking farm records. We're progressing, and we're moving fast in our understanding of possibilities; but we haven't yet moved very far from the old-time stagnation. Everything that's being done on the farms of to-day will be better done in the next generation. Our feet aren't yet accustomed to the new forward stride after so many centuries of just marking time. Every blessed thing in the new science of farming has been discovered and developed since I was a boy. We're mighty vain of all this brand-new advancement; but don't you think it likely that the farmers of the next generation



may look back over our work and smile at the half way things we've done and the half way goals we've been striving for? It may do us good to brood over that a bit.

I think I should feel a little mean in settling back and resting content with what we've done, even though it suffices for our needs, when I know that we haven't yet rendered any real service to anybody but ourselves. So long as that chance of service lies plain before us we shall keep right ahead. Perhaps the vision has some sentiment in it, but the realization will be practical enough.

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## XV

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I'VE found out about that mocking bird. He's quit his singing; I haven't heard a peep out of him for a week. He's too busy. Late yesterday afternoon, when the first hint of the evening coolness of the mountains was in the air, Laura and I sat in the shade of the grape-vine that hides the nest. We were talking a little, by fits and starts, and watching Peggy and Betty as they played at "tea party" on the grass before their tiny house.

Then there came a sudden flash of warm brown and warm gray in the slanting sunlight, and there was the songster of last week balancing airily on a stem of the vine just over our heads, flicking his tail with sharp, excited jerks, twisting sideways to take a keen look at us. He must have figured us out as harmless, for he went hopping along the stem to disappear in the thick leafage. We saw why he hadn't been singing lately: He held a small brown grasshopper in his bill! In a moment there came from the deeply sheltered nest a sound

as unmistakable as the contented sighing of a babe at the breast. Daddy was stuffing his grasshopper down a yawning, hungry pink throat. In another flash he was gone to find another tidbit. He's keeping at it steadily, from morning till night. He is certainly a busy bird!

"Well!" I said. "The old man has had a come-down, hasn't he?"

"Has he?" Laura asked quietly. Her eyes were on our own babies at our feet. The simple question caught me up short.

"No, no!" I said. "God knows I didn't mean that. He's been promoted; he's gone up to the very head of his class—as far up as any male thing may ever hope to get in this life."

We didn't argue the matter. There was no need. We only sat and looked about us and let the calm of the coming dusk take possession of us.

It was an exquisite picture we saw. Near lay our cornfields, a very embodiment of Plenty brought magically into being. A light air swept across the tasseled ranks of the corn, and they bent, rustling, whispering of the profound mystery. It needed no abnormal fancy to catch a hint of what they talked about.



We'll never learn the strange, wild-sweet vocabulary, maybe; but if we will we may understand the spirit of it. Life's abounding goodness—that's what it all means. And beyond our own lay other fields of corn, stretching away and away into the distances, covering the land with life's eternal assurance. Among the corn, embroidery of gold on the rich, deep green, were fields of wheat stubble after harvest, dotted with stacked mounds of their grain ready for the hands of the threshers. Here and there, nestled in trees, stood the homes of the farmers, gray-walled, gray-roofed, with the smoke of the supper fires curling and drifting from the chimney tops and melting into the evening haze. Slowly, slowly, while we watched, the hill-rimmed cup of the valley filled with purple shadows, a flood of wondrous color, rising, swelling, brimming over. Listening, we could hear the far, faint sounds of the life of the farms—the rattle of a wagon homeward bound over a country lane, the friendly-sounding bark of a house-dog, the shrill whinny of a hungry colt for its dam. So homely it was, and so beautiful! It gave me a little pang of wistfulness.

"I wish I were a poet," I said. "I'd like to

sing of all this glory." But in the next minute I had to laugh. "No," I told myself, "it's better just to live in it than to sing of it. There's that mocker. He quit his singing to feed his babies. I'll bet he's a far happier chap than he was last week. This is the better part!"

The full tide of the dusk was upon us. Little Betty left her play and came to my knee, coaxing to be taken in for her night's drink of new milk. Dorothy called to us from the house, summoning us to the late summertime supper. So we went into the cheerful dining-room and sat down together.

We had a couple of guests at the table—not "company" folks, but good friends who have learned to be at home here. There was some gay talk over the meal; not frivolous nor smart; serious enough at moments, but light-hearted for all that, carefree, with a laugh always ready to follow close upon the heels of the spoken word. We were feeling pretty good.

After supper, when the youngsters were in bed, somebody hinted at a rubber of whist; but somehow we drifted out to the lawn, with rugs spread upon the grass in the soft twilight, and there we went on with our talk.

The talk turned by and by to another summer night out of doors—our first night on the farm, six years ago, when we camped in the thicket down by the big spring, strangers facing a new life with only a vision to guide us. That time seemed very remote now, separated from this day by a world of curious experience—no, not curious, but vivid, vital, transforming. It needed no deep self-scrutiny to discover that I'd become another man in those six years. The change was more than a change in interests or in manner of living or in outlook; it was a change that went to the very heart's core. Is it egotism to say that I've become a wise man? All right; but don't grudge me that indulgence. Say if you like that there are degrees and degrees of wisdom. What I mean is that upon the whole I'm more wise than foolish. I'm rid now of just about all of the insanities that may fill a man's life with doubts and distresses.

Farming has made the change; nothing else. You know how easily a man's thinking may become all littered up with the non-essentials if the life about him is tangled and confused. He mistakes the shadows for realities and the realities for shadows till after a while the whole



scheme of things seems no better than a vain illusion. There's only one cure for that: To find the way back to simplicity.

Ours is simple living, and it has led me into plain, straight ways of thinking. Can you believe me when I say that I have no doubts now about life? It's entirely true. Why should I have, when Life itself has been patiently teaching me?

We talked of these things the other night out of doors; talked on and on while the constellations marched orderly, stately, unhalting across the infinite background of the sky. We were in a fine temper for trying to put ourselves right, with the mood of the great outdoors to help. We slept peacefully that night.

Laura hasn't read a great deal of this story as it's been a-writing—a scrap now and then, pronouncing a mild sort of approval. I haven't minded that, for I know what the trouble must be. Though I've let you see some of the surface signs of the delight we've known, I've failed to say so many things I ought to have said, so many things I'd like to have said, so many things I would have said but for the luckless circumstance that I can't find the right words for them. It's of no use to search

the lexicons or the books of synonyms; the words I want aren't there. I've been searching everywhere for them, but they elude me. I'm beginning to wonder if anybody has yet found them, or if they aren't still to be molded out of the flux of life. There must be words still unborn, better than any we know. You'll think so if you ever try to tell a plain true story like this. If I were only romancing there would be plenty of words crowding up for attention; but for use in a bit of truth-telling there are so few!

Where's the word for supreme content, for unfaltering faith in the Divine order of things? There isn't any; but there will be some time. The wordsmiths won't be the fellows who'll make it. It will leap warm and living out of the heart of somebody all unlearned in everything but content and faith. When the right time comes, suddenly he'll look up from his work and speak the great word simply.

I wish I had it now, for that's the word I'd like to use in telling of the spirit that hovers over Happy Hollow. It's a passion too deep to be sounded, a calm too perfect to be ruffled, both rolled into one. We would have that feeling astir in us though we had failed as farm-

ers, though we had done no better at crop-growing than the poor tenant before us. The abundance of the fields is good, and we're very thankful that it has come to us; but if it had been withheld we shouldn't be bankrupt in content if only life were given us here in the hills. It's a feeling that seems to belong to this perfect setting, regardless of all the minor circumstances. Just to look out into the soft glory of a misty morning; just to see life astir at the height of a fervid summer noontime; just to draw close about the kindly hearth-fire on a blustery winter evening; just to feel the good earth under us and the deep sky over us and the sheltering hills round about us—that's enough.

Though we've fared so much better than she in the circumstances of life, Jake's poor old mother knows as well as we do what this feeling is. Yes, she knows it better, for it hasn't been tangled up in her heart with so many other feelings.

Early one Sunday morning we went up the mountainside to make her a little visit. Her cabin was very bare. On the table was a bit of the cold cornbread she had made her breakfast upon, and on the back of a rusted sheetiron



stove no bigger than a toy stood her blackened coffee pot. She had a rough homemade table in one corner; her chair was a cracker-box on end, and squeezed in beside the table was a narrow bed with drawn ropes for springs. We were welcome, though we had to stand up for our call because there was nothing to sit upon.

"Ain't it sure a powerful pretty mornin'?" she said. "I've been watchin' it sence sun-up, through the trees. Sunday, ain't it? I knowed it was. A body ought to go to meetin' Sundays. I used to go; but it seems like when a woman gits as old as me she don't always have clothes. I ain't got none but this dress I got on. But if I don't go to meetin' I kin stay home an' be thankful. Ain't a person got a lot to be thankful fer? I got my health, an' I got my home. The' ain't no reason fer anybody bein' good to an old woman like me; but they are. A lady in town done give me that stove yest'd'y, an' I packed it over the mountain. It's been terrible unhandy, cookin' my victuals on a chip fire outdoors. Sence Jake died it's kind o' hard fer me to git work sometimes; but I'm piecin' a quilt that I'll git a dollar fer when it's done. It's sort o' slow, 'count of my fingers bein' so old an' stiff; but

a body oughtn't to complain none about that. A dollar will keep me in meal an' coffee a long time, won't it? I ain't got anybody but the Lord to take keer of me; but He's doin' it, ain't he? I sure am thankful."

What has that spirit to do with large success? Isn't it in itself the largest of all successes? I'll leave it to you.

When the harvest is finished next fall and the farm is put in shipshape for the winter, Laura and I with our children are going over to Egypt and then up through some of the countries to the north, Italy and France and Germany and England and a few other places. That's to be a part of our children's education. We want them to see some pictures and hear some music and get something of the "feel" of the great world and its great history. We think they'll be the better for that, and maybe usefuller when they come to take their places.

We shan't spend much time in the feverish capitals—just time enough to give us some sharp effects of contrast. We're going for the most part along quiet ways so we may see real life instead of the poor counterfeits.

I suppose the folks will spend most of their time in the towns and villages, in the libraries

and galleries and cathedrals and in the town homes. I shall spend my time mostly with the farmers, living in their houses, working with them at their jobs, getting as close as I'm able to the minds and hearts of the living men and women on the soil. I've had just about town enough in mine.

We're not to pay for this trip out of the hoarded profits of our farming at Happy Hollow. If we tried that, we'd get stuck somewhere between here and New York. I've turned back to my magazine writing to help me through with some emergency money. At that, they won't see me staking high heaps of gold at Monte Carlo. We're going quietly, modestly, keeping prudent watch over the pennies. There will be nothing of the tip-giving, racing, breathless, bored-to-death American tourist about us. We shall move leisurely, stopping where we want to stop, with money enough for shelter and food. Ours won't be a glittering "progress," and we shan't bring back marbles or canvases or costly trophies. We shall travel as befits such a family as ours, eager to get the utmost of enduring good out of the opportunity of a lifetime.

I'm telling you this, not for the fact alone,



but because the prospect has shown in a curious way what the life of Happy Hollow has done to me. Save on the family's account, I'm not half so keen for the trip as I fancied I should be. Honestly, I don't more than half want to go for my own pleasure. I'd just about as soon stay at home here in the Arkansas hills.

That wasn't my temper six years ago. If we had planned then for such an adventure I'd have spent excited days and sleepless nights on the planning. That's not the case now. I'm brushing up my German and Spanish a bit, and I'm trying to direct the children as I'm able in some reading they ought to do before we go; but my own days' work goes on right placidly, free of nervous exaltation. Not that I'm indifferent. I know it will be a wonderful experience and that I'll come home with sympathies broadened and understanding mightily quickened. I'm always anxious for new human contacts, and I'll get some on this trip. But with all that in prospect I'm not so keen for it as I should have been before we came to the farm.

I know what you're thinking: "Why, that man's getting old! He must be losing his grip." But that's not the explanation. Maybe

if I tell you a little story it will help you to understand.

This Fayetteville country was settled years and years before the railroad was built—and that's nearly forty years ago. A new railroad has come in lately. Last summer I rode back into the hills a dozen miles east of home, and there I stopped at a farmhouse one day. The farmer was a middle-aged man, and his father who lived with him was "goin' on eighty." At dinner our talk ran for a time on the new railway and the advantages it would give us farmers in the way of better markets for our stuff and better shipping rates. It was the younger man who did most of the talking. By and by the old father broke in.

"Hit's kind o' cur'us," he said, "but I ain't ever seen thet first railroad yit. Hit's done been thar a long while, too. I've sort o' figgered sometimes thet I'd go in an' hev a look at that darned thing, just for cur'osity; but I ain't never got round to it, an' I don't expect as how I ever will. What'd be the use? Hit don't take a railroad to make me happy. If I've ever got any time to spend in lookin', I can set right here on the front porch an' look across the cove at the hills. They're a heap

better to look at than a common railroad. I don't b'lieve a railroad would content me to look at like these hills does."

Well, there you are! Say if you like that the old man was hopelessly primitive and behind the times; but he's so far ahead of the times in the supreme good of life that not many of us will ever catch up with him.

I've learned to feel pretty much as he does toward the glories of these hills. They've given me what I needed. I've looked at them for so long now, whenever there's a brief chance to look away from my work, that I know every round line and every gentle curve and every play of light and shadow as I know the soft curve of my baby's cheek and the light in her eyes. I'm going to be sorry when the time comes to turn my back upon them and go away to look at other hills.

We'll see some great old hills, of course; hills sheltering happy valleys, hills that have been blood-soaked and tormented through centuries of bitter struggle, hills in whose shadows great races of men have worked and fought and suffered out their destinies; but we'll see no hills so good as these at home.

Home! Isn't that the very word I was fuss-



ing about a little while ago—the word that hadn't been found—the word that would stand for faith and content and goodness? Why, of course that's it! And we've had it all the time! Home!

What is the idea of home, anyway? You needn't bother to turn to the dictionaries. I've just this minute looked through half a dozen of them; and what do you suppose I've found? Listen: "The house in which one resides; place or country in which one dwells; pertaining to one's dwelling; the abode of the family to which one belongs; a place or state of rest or comfort; a future state; the grave." Now what do you think of that?

Yet that's not surprising, when you think of it. We have the one great word; how dare we hope to find other words fit to define it with? It can't be done. There isn't any definition.

But, oh, I wish you could see the picture I'm looking at just now! Then you'd understand.

It's evening. There are long shadows across the land. The day has been warm, but the air is coming cool now from the heights. Work is over. From my window I can see Sam going wearily through the yard toward his cottage with his two little boys. My own family is

gathering in for supper time. Laura has been working with her honeysuckles and roses this afternoon, and she's tired, sitting by the big open south window and waiting for Dorothy to call. On the floor in the middle of the living-room the two littler children are sprawled at their length with a book. Peggy is telling stories, and Betty's voice is chirping along behind, trying to pronounce some of the easy words. Peggy is laughing at her queer, quaint accents; and the baby laughs, too, without knowing what it's about. To laugh seems to strike her as the only thing to do. My son has just come by my desk, laying his hand upon my shoulder with a jolly word. Twilight is softening the lines of the wide rooms. We'll light the lamps pretty soon, and the wide spaces under the spreading roof will shine out golden. There's no evil under this roof, no bitterness, no sorrow, but only a divine content. This is Home!

THE END.







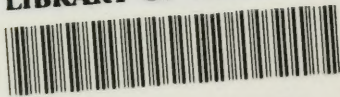








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